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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

WRITING CONFERENCES IN THE ELEMENTARY GRADES

by



FRANCES YESKE

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH  
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## THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

## FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled WRITING CONFERENCES IN THE ELEMENTARY GRADES submitted by FRANCES YESKE in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of EDUCATION.





## ABSTRACT

This study focused on teachers' and students' perceptions of writing conferences, the nature of observed writing conferences and the extent of congruence among the teachers' perceptions, students' perceptions and the analyses of the nature of the observed writing conferences.

Six students and their teachers were videotaped in two individual writing conferences. Information concerning students' and teachers' perceptions of writing conferences in general, their perceptions of specific writing conferences and background information was obtained through general interviews, pre- and post-conference interviews and stimulated recall.

Transcripts of the interviews were examined and verbatim excerpts identified. The videotapes and transcripts of the conferences were examined for the six elements of scaffolding (Graves, 1982, 1983c) and for other distinguishing features. Profiles of each teacher and case studies of each student were built. The data from all the profiles and case studies was then pooled and examined in reference to the research questions.

It was found that there were commonalities among the teachers' perceptions of conferences in general and among the students' perceptions of conferences in general. In addition, each teacher had unique perceptions which appeared to reflect his/her particular beliefs about writing and/or



teaching style. Distinct differences amongst the students' perceptions were also noted. There was some congruence between the teachers' and students' perceptions of conferences in general in regards to the purpose, predictable elements and positive feelings about conferences. There was no congruence in regards to the factors affecting the quality of a conference.

There were similarities among the teachers' perceptions of specific conferences and among the students' perceptions of specific conferences. Each teacher and each student also had unique perceptions which appeared to reflect the individual's beliefs, strengths or personality. There was a high degree of congruence between the teachers' and students' perceptions of specific conferences in regards to two of the major goals of conferences, ownership of a piece of writing and positive feelings about conferences. The teachers' and students' reasons for their positive feelings however differed considerably. There was some congruence in regards to predictable structures and humorous or playful moments.

In each case study evidence of predictablility, focus, role reversal, nomenclature and humor was observed. Evidence of demonstrable solution was observed in five of the six case studies. Other distinguishing features which gave the conferences a particular tone or flavor were also noted.

Each teacher's and each student's perceptions of the specific writing conferences were usually consistent with the researcher's observations of the nature of the confer-





ences.

Implications for teaching emerged concerning the use of conferences to promote knowledge of writing, student understanding of his own writing process and student expectation of ownership of his writing. The desirability of discussing ideas, opinions and expectations of conferences with students was suggested. Attention was drawn to the importance of predictability in conferences. The use of videotaping to improve conference techniques was suggested.

Several recommendations for further research were made.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The quality of children's writing has led to widespread alarm among many educators and the general public. The cry of "Back to the Basics" by politicians and the media has made writing in the classroom a controversial issue. Beleaguered teachers facing societal and parental pressure and having a genuine desire to improve children's writing look to researchers to discover successful writing methodology.

The current trend in writing research has moved away from a focus on the product to one on process. More emphasis has been placed on the role of the teacher as facilitator during the writing process. The conference approach to writing popularized by Donald Graves is considered to be compatible with a process approach to writing instruction. One of the key components of the conference approach to writing is the teacher-student conference. This study will examine several aspects of this type of writing conference.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine 1) teachers' and students' perceptions of writing conferences, 2) the nature of writing conferences, and 3) the extent of congruence amongst the teachers' perceptions, students' perceptions, and the analysis of the nature of the observed writ-



ing conferences.

### Research Questions

Based upon the major purposes of the study, the following research questions were posed.

1. What are the teachers' perceptions of writing conferences in general?

2. What are the students' perceptions of writing conferences in general?

3. What is the congruence between the teachers' perceptions and students' perceptions of writing conferences in general?

4. What are the teachers' perceptions of specific writing conferences in which they were involved?

5. What are the students' perceptions of specific writing conferences in which they were involved?

6. What is the congruence between the teachers' perceptions and the students' perceptions of specific writing conferences?

7. What is the nature of the observed writing conferences?

8. What is the congruence between the teachers' perceptions of writing conferences and the observed nature of the conference?

9. What is the congruence between the students' perceptions of writing conferences and the observed nature of the conference?





### Definition of Terms for the Purpose of This Study

Conference: A scheduled one-to-one discussion between a teacher and a student concerning some aspect of the child's involvement in the writing process.

Congruence: The state or quality of being in agreement.

Perception: A statement of the "understanding knowledge, etc. got by perceiving or a specific idea, concept, impression, etc. so formed." (Webster's New World Dictionary)

Scaffolding: The temporary structures a teacher uses during the writing conference process. The six elements contained in scaffolding include predictability, focus, demonstrable solutions, role reversal, nomenclature and humor or playfulness (Graves: 1982, 1983c).

Stimulated Recall: The stimulating of a teacher's or a child's recall of the thought processes which occurred during or after a writing conference, by means of viewing a videotape of the conference.

### Brief Outline of the Study

Six grade three and four students and the three teachers responsible for their writing program participated in the study.

Each student and his/her teacher were videotaped in three individual conferences with the first conference con-



sidered a practice session. Therefore, the study involved twelve conferences. At least two general interviews were held with each student and teacher. Information concerning the students' and teachers' perceptions of writing conferences in general as well as background information was obtained during the interviews. Pre- and post- conference interviews were conducted to obtain information about the students' and teachers' perceptions of the specific conferences in which they were involved.

All of the interviews and conferences were audiotaped and transcribed. Transcripts were thoroughly examined and verbatim excerpts identified in relation to the research questions posed. The videotapes and transcripts of the conferences were examined for evidence of the six elements of scaffolding (Graves: 1982,1983) as well as for other distinguishing features.

The data is reported first in case study format and then the data from all the cases is pooled and examined in reference to the research questions.

#### Limitations of the Study

1. The small sample of students, teachers and conferences constrains the ability to generalize the findings.

2. Only scheduled individual conferences were videotaped. No account is made for incidental or group conferences.

3. The presence of the researcher and the videotape may



have altered the normal course of events. In addition, some conferences were videotaped outside the classroom. This may have affected the subjects' performance.

4. The validity and reliability of the study is limited by possible researcher bias.

### Overview of the Organization of the Chapters

In this first chapter, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the definition of terms, the limitations of the study and a brief outline of the procedures for gathering and analyzing the data were presented. In Chapter Two, a review of the related literature is presented. Chapter Three describes in detail the design of the study. In Chapter Four the findings are reported in case study format. In Chapter Five, the data from all the case studies is pooled and examined in reference to the research questions. A summary of the study, conclusions, and implications for educational practice and research are presented in Chapter Six.



## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

#### Overview

This chapter reviews the literature and research concerned with trends in research in writing, the landmark work of Donald Graves, writing conferences, insights from other fields with respect to conferences and research on writing conferences.

#### Trends in Research into Writing

A review of the research into written composition indicates growing interest as well as a shift in the focus from product to process and the use of different research methodologies.

Research in writing has been very meager compared to the number of studies and the amount of money spent on other areas in education. Graves (1980) reported that between 1955 and 1972 the funds for writing research came to less than one-tenth of one percent of all research funds for education. He also found that only 156 studies on writing in the elementary grades had been carried out in the last twenty-five years. However, more than half of all these studies were completed in the last seven years, demonstrating a growing interest in writing research. Research in





writing has also recently extended beyond the doctoral student to include research advisors, other professionals and teachers.

Until the last decade, research into writing was dominated by experimental methodology which emphasized the quantifiable. Consequently research tended to focus on measurable aspects of the written product. Frequency counts were generally used. Illustrative examples of these kinds of studies follow.

Hunt (1965) looked at developmental trends in grammatical structures across three grade levels. He developed the T-Unit as a means of quantifying grammatical structures. Hunt collected a one-thousand word writing sample from each of eighteen children in grade four, eight, and twelve. He analyzed each sample for the frequency of various grammatical structures. Hunt concluded that T-Unit length was closely related to maturity. Younger children tended to use short clauses to express their meanings, whereas older students tended to reduce such clauses to mere modifiers thus achieving greater length. The older students could incorporate and consolidate more grammatical structures with a single grammatically interrelated unit.

Harris (as cited in Braddock, Lloyd-Jones and Schoer, 1963) compared the effect of instruction in formal grammar on the writing of 228 twelve to fourteen-year old students. Five classes studied and applied the terms of formal grammar in composition work. The experimental group used none of



the terms and devoted the time saved to direct practice in writing.

For one of his measures, Harris used a short answer test on the terms and application of formal grammar. He also used frequency counts of the various types of sentence construction and common grammatical errors found in the students' compositions. Frequency counts were made from essays written at the beginning and end of a two year period of instruction.

Harris (1962) concluded that although the formal grammar classes made significantly higher gains in the grammar test, the study of grammatical terminology had a negligible or even a relatively harmful effect on the correctness of children's writing.

The latest trend in writing research is a focus on the writing process, that is, on what writers actually do during the composing process. Experimental designs have been replaced by descriptive case study approaches. Detailed descriptions of the contexts in which the data is collected are included. The following quotation from Graves (1980) illustrates the importance placed on context and process.

Research about writing must be suspect when it ignores context or process. Unless researchers describe in detail the full context of data gathering and the processes of learning and teaching, the data cannot be exported from room to room. Devoid of context the data become sterile. (p. 917-918)

Two examples of studies which focus on process and use a case study approach are those of Emig (1969) and Nolan



(1978).

Emig (1969) used a case study approach to examine the composing processes of eight grade twelve students. Students were asked to compose aloud as they wrote and retrospective comments were also obtained. From an analysis of the case studies, Emig gained insights into the writing process. She developed a category system comprised of ten dimensions of the composing process.

Nolan (1978) used a combination of techniques including introspective and retrospective comments to focus on the writing process of six grade six able writers. He derived a category system for the different facets of composing a story to which the students referred.

It is the work of Donald Graves, however, which has become a landmark in current writing research and thought.

#### The Landmark Work of Donald Graves

Donald Graves has had a tremendous impact on both research into writing and the pedagogy of writing. A description of his research and pedagogical ideas follows.

Using ethnographic data gathering techniques, Graves (1973, 1975a) examined the writing processes of seven-year-old children. Although other data was collected the primary emphasis was the collection of extensive case study data on eight children. Graves' (1973, 1975a) findings led to conclusions in five areas: learning environment, sex differences in writing, developmental factors and the writing



process, procedures used in the study and the one reported case study. Concerning the case study, Graves (1973, 1975a) concluded that at any given point in a writing episode, many variables contribute to the writing process and that the writing process is as variable and unique as the individual's personality.

In a two-year study at Atkinson Academy, New Hampshire, Graves along with his colleagues, Susan Sowers and Lucy McCormick Calkins, investigated how children learn to write. Based to a large extent on the findings of this study, Graves published a number of articles and a book entitled, Writing: Teacher and Children at Work. In his book, Graves provides teachers with a rationale, a structure and numerous practical suggestions for a conference approach to writing. Since the teachers in this study based their writing programs on the ideas outlined in this book, a description of some of the features of Graves' conference approach to teaching writing follows.

In the conference approach, children are encouraged to take "ownership" or responsibility for their writing. Because children choose their own topics, the writing is meaningful to them and they are able to draw upon their own knowledge base. Children continue to have choices and make decisions throughout the writing process. Daily writing time is established so that children have many opportunities to write. Teachers write with the students modelling strategies and forms of writing. Graves believes that a





highly predictable writing environment where the child knows the routines should be established. The approach is individualized since children are always at different stages in the writing process. One child may be starting a story while another is revising for publication. Spelling, mechanics and handwriting are not emphasized in first drafts, instead the content or the message is. Children regularly publish their writing which along with a desire to clarify intentions often provide a child with a purpose and the motivation for revision. The key to the conference approach is the conference. It is through the conference that the teaching-learning relationship is individualized.

### Writing Conferences

Writing conferences have become increasingly popular, bordering on a panacea amongst educators from elementary to college level. Among the many benefits cited is the compatibility of writing conferences with a process approach to the teaching of writing.

Writing conferences can occur at any point in the writing process. Unlike traditional postmortems -- the corrections and comments in completed papers -- conferences enable writers to get feedback and make improvements as they write. Teachers and students see writing as an evolving process rather than as an unalterable product.

(Bissex, 1982, p. 75)

Carnicelli (1980, p. 102) states that "conferences are especially effective in a process approach because they occur when the student needs and appreciates the help." Graves



(1983c), Sawkins (1975), and Cadieux (1982) all express similar views.

"Children need a teacher who provides help while the writing is taking place rather than giving criticisms and correction after first drafts and returning the writing for correction or revision." (Sawkins, 1975 p.48)

Individualization of the teaching/learning experience is another often cited advantage of writing conferences (Carnicelli, 1980), Duke (1975), Graves (1983c), Turbill (1983). "A conference is the supreme means of individualizing teaching/learning; it is a one to one interaction in which the teacher fosters self-learning by the child." (Turbill, 1982, p. 85)

Some of the other reasons cited for using conferences include the belief that a teacher can give a more effective response to a student in an oral conference than in a written comment (Carnicelli, 1980; Pierson, 1972). Conferences are also said to promote self-learning (Carnicelli, 1980; Graves, 1983c; Turbill, 1982), higher levels of thought (Freedman, 1982, 1983) and two-way communication between the teacher and student (Pierson, 1972). It is also believed that "conferences can lead to dramatic changes in children's writing" (Graves, 1982, p.76).

Since this study focuses directly on writing conferences, a rather detailed account of Graves' rationale and suggested techniques for conducting conferences as well as a description of the six elements of scaffolding follows.

Graves (1983c, p. 138) cites three reasons for the use



of conferences.

1) When the child talks, the teacher learns. The teacher can learn what the child feels is important. Graves (1983c) feels that "teachers can't afford to be without this energy-giving power of the children's knowledge (p. 138). 2) When the child talks, the child learns. "Children discover both new information and the personal satisfaction that goes with knowing something when they hear the information from their mouths" (p. 138). There is also an audience present to mirror the child's knowing. Furthermore, by acquiring the language to talk about writing, children gain greater perspective of a text. 3) When the child talks, the teacher can help. "As long as children talk, not only does the teacher gain more information about the subject, but the teacher acquires perspective of what will help the children" (p. 138).

Conferences may take a few seconds or ten minutes, can occur at any time in the writing process and can deal with any aspect of the writing process. Group conferences can also be scheduled.

Graves offers several suggestions on how to conduct conferences. Of primary importance is helping the child to speak. Graves (1983c) suggests teachers avoid conference settings which contribute to adversary relationships such as sitting opposite the child. Instead the teacher should sit near and next to the child and as close to equal height as possible. The child should have his writing in front of him



and there should be eye contact with the teacher. Conferences should be predictable. "Children speak more when the conference is predictable." (p. 99). Because the child is comfortable with some of the structures, teachers can ask challenging questions. Graves (1983c) reminds teachers to allow children time to answer a question. He emphasizes listening to students. By really listening to the child talk, the teacher becomes an interested and entrusted listener as well as a co-learner.

At the core of the conference is a teacher asking a child to teach her about the subject. The aim is to foster a bursting desire to inform. So the teacher never implies a greater knowledge of this topic than the child possesses, nor treats the child as an inferior learner. We are in the business of helping children to value what they know." (Graves, cited in Turbill, 1982, p. 34)

The teacher should receive the child's piece of writing. That is to say the teacher should provide the child with a short precis of what he has said. Because writers need to hear their own words coming back to them, teachers should try to use the actual words of the writer.

After receiving the child's piece, the teacher should try to learn more about what the writer knows. Graves feels that our task as teachers is to help children write the stories not yet written, those that they might not even be aware of. The teacher looks for potential by listening and observing. She closely follows what the child says so that she knows what to say. Challenging questions follow questions which the child can easily answer.





Graves (1983c) believes there are no "right" questions to pose in a conference. He explains why questions cannot be transferred from child to child.

Questions depend on reading where the child is -- in his draft, in the context of his development as a writer, and in what he has already said in a conference. After I have asked a child one question, every subsequent question depends upon what the child has already said. (p. 107)

Graves does however explain the functions and contexts of some of the different types of questions. He explains how different types of questions help children and provide teachers with different kinds of useful information. The question types he mentions are those that open conferences, follow the writer's information, deal with basic structures, deal with process, reveal development and cause a loss of control.

Graves (1983c) identifies six elements which he feels ought to be part of the teacher-student exchange over a series of conferences. A research colleague of Graves, Susan Sowers, had noted that the same principles which underlie a child's acquisition of language and behavior from its mother, a process which Bruner called scaffolding, occurred in the interaction between the child and the teacher in a writing conference. Scaffolding refers to the temporary structures the mother uses to adapt to the child's language and behavior. The scaffold changes as the child grows but the principles of the temporary structures do not. The six elements of scaffolding teachers use during the



conference process include predictability, focus, demonstrable solutions, role reversal, nomenclature and playfulness or humor.

Predictability - A conference can be predictable in terms of time, setting and structure. In order for the child to be comfortable in taking risks, he should be able to predict most of what will happen in a conference. Predictable structures enable the teacher to ask challenging questions which produce imbalances in the child's piece. "In short, the teacher is predictable in order to be unpredictable, but unpredictable where it counts ... on the main focus, the most important teaching point of the conference" (p. 274). Predictable structures also help the teacher gain a better perception of the child and the process because the teacher has used the same structures many times with the same child and with other children. Children can also learn to replicate conferences to help each other, if conferences are predictable.

Demonstrable Solutions - Teachers show what they mean instead of telling. Often showing is in the form of questions which leads the writer to see the answer for himself. Other ways in which solutions are demonstrated include the teacher modelling composing and revising on an easel or overhead or helping one child solve a problem while two others look on.

Role Reversal - Children are free to initiate questions and comments and to demonstrate their own solutions. Predictable structures promote role reversal. As the child inter-



nalizes these structures, he speaks without prompting and initiates more questions.

Focus - The teacher focuses on only one or two features of the child's writing. Graves (1983c) explains how the general focus of a conference changes depending upon where the child is in his draft. In the first conference the teacher might focus on questions that lead the child to discover his topic. In the second conference, the teacher might ask questions that focus on organization. In the third conference the focus might be on commas in a series. Mechanical skills are rarely taught in early drafts. Graves suggests the teacher consider the writer's intention, the frequency of the skill problem and the place of the writer in the draft before choosing to focus on skills.

Nomenclature - Children need to develop a language to talk about writing because they are often asked about how they write. This language is learned in the context of the child's own paper. At first children may use specific words without understanding their exact meaning. In time, however, these words are used with intention and precision and affect the quality of the child's writing.

Humor or Playfulness - Humor is characteristic of successful conferences. It relieves tension and provides a needed distance from the composing process. Graves believes that

... a playful atmosphere is possible because of all the other components of the scaffolding-conference process. Unless there is a high degree of predictability, with focus, demonstrable solutions, reversible roles, and



a growing fund of language that all parties understand, neither play nor humor can run their course. (p. 280)

The preceding description of some of the most pertinent features of Graves' work demonstrates how he has provided teachers with a rationale, a structure and techniques for conducting writing conferences.

One educator has questioned aspects of Graves' conference approach to writing. In the next section, Barrs' (1983) criticism to Graves' approach and his response to her criticism are reported.

Barrs (1983) has been critical of Graves' approach suggesting he has moved from a study of process directly into pedagogy. As well Barrs (1983) feels that this pedagogy is "... at times a pedagogy of a highly dogmatic and interventionist nature" (p. 833). She cites examples from Graves' and his associates' work which she feels shows the teacher blithely interrupting the child's writing process to suggest revision. Barrs (1983) feels that another example of dogmatic teaching in the Graves literature concerns the place of fiction in the children's writing. The children, she feels, are discouraged from writing fiction. "Narrative fiction is a problem for Graves and his associates, perhaps because it cannot be so tightly modelled and controlled as autobiographical and factual writing. And "make believe" seems to be viewed, sometimes, with an air of disapproval which verges on the moral ..." (p. 867).

Barrs (1983) feels that Graves' model is a journalistic





model, a method of teaching writing through revising. In this model, it is important to choose a topic on which you have plenty of information, develop it by adding detail and then "... punch it to the reader as hard as possible" (p. 837. This model, Barrs (1983) feels ignores writing as a process of discovery and justifies the discouragement of less 'revisable' kinds of writing. Barrs (1983) does not suggest that drafting is unimportant, but feels that Graves and his associates have routinized it as a part of pedagogy.

In his response to Barrs' article, Graves (1983b) points out that the examples Barrs cited were from the first year of his study. As such, they are not representative of the entire study, and do not reflect the changes in practices or the emphasis placed on certain practices. Graves (1983b) feels that the basic disagreement between Barrs and himself is in the role of the teacher in helping children learn to write. Graves (1983b) feels that children learn through solving problems; they sense imbalances and try to right them. Most of the time the children can handle the imbalances. If they cannot, however, the teacher should intervene and help. Graves (1983b) feels that there has been misuse of the study's data on revision and development. He too is critical of children being forced to revise "willy-nilly." Revision, he feels, should take place more because of classroom conditions than because of the direct intervention of the teacher.

Graves (1983b) states that overall he agrees with Barrs



in the need for less intervention. He also argues for "more parsimonious, intelligent intervention" (p. 846). Graves' (1983b) response to Barrs' article does not address a major issue Barrs raises, that is, the move from a study of process to a pedagogy.

### Conducting Conferences -- Insights from Other Fields

Although Graves has been the most influential in popularizing and structuring writing conferences, a number of other educators and professionals from allied fields have suggested models and techniques to follow in conducting conferences. Some educators have suggested that teachers draw upon the sociologists' and counsellors' knowledge of the interview process. Other educators caution against adapting their non-directive techniques. One educator suggests using a knowledge of the students' socio-economic background to shape conference strategies.

Pierson (1972) and Duke (1975) suggest teachers adapt some of the strategies used in non-directive counselling to conduct conferences. Both feel that children respond more easily to their relationship with a teacher than to his powers of logic or persuasion.

Arbur (1977) feels that writing conferences are often "undifferentiated played by ear experiences" (p. 338) which leaves the teacher unsure of any accomplishment. To rectify this situation, he suggest that English teachers can use the results of the social workers' analyses of the interview



process. Arbur (1977) describes how the seven elements of a sociologist's interview can be applied to student-teacher writing conferences.

Carnicelli (1980) comments on Duke's advocacy of the use of non-directive counsellors' strategies. He feels that Duke has glossed over the essential difference between a writing teacher and a Rogerian therapist. The essential difference, Carnicelli (1980) feels, is that the therapist's function is to lead clients to clarify or develop their own individual values. The function of the writing teacher, on the other hand, is to lead students to adapt a common criteria of good writing shared by the teacher and educated people in general. Carnicelli (1980) feels that because of this basic difference in function the writing teacher must be more judgmental and more directive than a therapist using the Rogerian non-directive approach.

In defining the teacher's role in a conference, Carnicelli (1980) outlines tasks which he believes a conference teacher must perform. These include such things as reading the paper carefully, focusing on strengths, evaluating the paper and making specific suggestions for revision.

Zelnick (1983) is critical of both Arbur's (1977) and Carnicelli's (1980) suggestions for conducting conferences. Instead he suggests using knowledge of the socio-economic forces that have shaped his students' lives to determine conference strategies.

Zelnick feels that the use of the sociologist's format



for interviews which Arbur advocates, has limited applicability to education. Zelnick (1983) feels that it is a task oriented and a people management approach which leaves no room for the personal dynamics of the student-teacher relationship.

Zelnick (1983) is also critical of what he calls Carnicelli's therapeutic model for conducting conferences. Zelnick (1983) feels that his students' problems do not stem from an inability to extend their awareness into deeper levels of what they have written. He sees his students as having two fundamental problems. First of all, they do not know what is involved in writing a paper, and secondly, they appear to have difficulty imagining communication that is not bound by an immediate context. In order to break through these problems, Zelnick (1983) gathers social/historical information about his students. He uses this information to choose strategies which will encourage students to draw on what is important to them outside of the university.

Ganter (1983), a professor of social work and Helman (1983), a clinical psychologist, provide advice in conducting conferences by pointing out psychological problems which may make it difficult for college students to allow themselves to be helped in conferences.

Ganter (1983) feels that a teacher must confront and respond to the psychological implications of students' behaviors. In her article, she draws attention to some of the psychological factors which influence a conference. She





explains some of the reasons students might defend themselves against self-knowledge. For example, a student who experiences the student-teacher relationship as threatening might be afraid he will learn something which will cause him to feel inferior. Ganter (1983) also discusses some of the implications self-observation has for some students and how they might defend against knowledge of their creativity.

Hellman (1983) explains that a student's capacity to learn and be helped through a conference depends upon the student's development of his sense of self. Hellman (1983) suggests several specific ways that a teacher can help alleviate difficulties with students who have self-esteem problems.

By pointing out some of the psychological factors which affect a conference, Ganter and Hellman have attempted to narrow the gap between a teacher's knowledge of her subject matter and her knowledge of the psychological significance of a student's behavior.

### Research into Writing Conferences

Although current literature in the teaching of writing consistently approves the use of writing conferences, little research has been carried out which directly concerns conferences. The following three studies were all conducted at the college level.

Jacob and Karliner (1977) examined the verbal interaction in conferences and the relationship between the nature



of the verbal interaction and the kinds of writing which resulted from it. They looked at the transcripts of two Freshman English students' conferences and the students' rough drafts and revised copies of their writing. They found that the way the student and instructor perceived their roles in the conference, either as a student and teacher or as two conversants, determined to a large extent whether the conference resulted in significant change in the cognitive level of the revised piece of writing. Their study does not take into account the possibility that what transpires in conferences may have a cumulative effect and as such may not be immediately evident.

Jacob and Karliner (1977) found that in one case the student did as much talking as the instructor and initiated comments and ideas. The instructor did not always assume a teacher role and as such shifted the rules of discourse away from those of the classroom and toward the conversational. The student was then compelled to keep up her end of the discussion. Acting as a listener, the instructor forced the student to generate her own thoughts. The student's revised composition reflected this thought. In the other case, the student deferred to the instructor throughout the conference and initiated few comments. The instructor talked more than the student, focused on the form of the paper rather than the subject and did not appear to realize that the student had not thought out his ideas. The revised composition did not reflect any real thinking.



Jacob and Karliner (1977) believe that conferences can be used to better the quality of thought in student writing. The instructor's role should be variable and dependent on what the student and his paper needs. Several techniques such as mirroring, posing genuine questions and making personal comments, can be used to change the role from teacher-student to conversant-conversant.

Freedman (1982, 1983) examined the transcripts of the conferences between one teacher and one high achieving and one low achieving Caucasian, and one high achieving and one low achieving Asian American.

The conferences, which were the first of the semester, were teacher controlled and centered around a discussion of the student's past experiences with writing, the student's performance in a class test and the student's first writing sample.

The conferences were transcribed and analyzed into topics of conversation and idea units. Topic shifts and the initiator of each topic were noted. Topics were labelled and classified as either intellectual, that is, dealing objectively with some aspect of the subject matter, or affective, that is, dealing with the participant's feelings, or other. The idea units were used to measure and compare the student's and teacher's amount of energy or focus devoted to each part of the conference conversation. As a way of discussing harmony or disharmony between the teacher and student, back channel cues were examined in similar segments



of discourse in the four conferences.

Freedman found that: 1) the different students wanted to focus on different types of topics, 2) the teacher focused on different types of intellectual topics for the different students, 3) the teacher gave more praise to the higher achieving students who appeared to elicit praise by expressing their insecurities about writing, 4) the lower achieving students initiated topics likely to alienate a teacher, and 5) the synchrony of the conversation broke down with the lowest achieving Asian-American student who inserted back-channel signals at inappropriate times in the conversation.

Freedman (1982, 1983) feels that the differences in the conversational interactions suggests the possibility of differential instruction. The teacher gave quantitatively and qualitatively different explanations to the four students. The higher achieving students received more expository explanations which were given in a more formal register. The higher achieving student was also more likely to receive a more elaborate invitation to return for future conferences.

Freedman (1982, 1983) reasoned that by analyzing teacher-student conferences and bringing to light much of what is unconscious in the interaction, we can begin to exert conscious control over negative aspects of the teacher-learning process and focus on those which are likely to be successful.





In another study at the college level, Carnicelli (1980) examined students' perceptions of conference teaching. He looked at approximately 1800 Freshman English students' written responses. Carnicelli did not perform a statistical analysis but recorded typical and recurring comments making a special effort to include any negative comments.

A great majority of the students liked the conference method and felt they had learned a great deal from it. The individual nature of the conference instruction is what impressed the students the most. Also apparent in the students' comments was the psychological value of individual conferences. A number of students, insecure about their writing ability, appreciated the privacy of the conferences and most of the students were impressed with their teacher's personal interest in them.

Carnicelli used the students' comments and transcripts of the two conferences to explain why the conference method works and how it can be used to best advantage.

In recent years a number of educators, including teachers acting as field researchers have written about writing conferences. Many of these are at the elementary level. Some of the accounts are personal testimonials of successful classroom practices.

Sowers (1982) analyzed some of the conferences collected in the New Hampshire Study at Atkinson Academy. Sowers



feels that faith in the power of the questions is misplaced because there are no magic questions. As an alternative to an "overreliance on questions as a bag of tricks" (p.76), Sowers describes three kinds of responses teachers can make in conferences. These kinds of responses to the content of the child's writing, reflect, expand, and select, can, Sowers feels, help the teacher see the writing through the child's eyes.

Turbill (1982) inspired by the work of Graves initiated a year long conference approach to writing involving twenty-seven schools in Australia. In her book, No Better Way to Teach Writing, Turbill (1982) not only explains the various facets of the program but also includes the teachers' positive views of the approach. As the title of the book suggests, Turbill (1982) and the project teachers are convinced that "...there is no better way to teach writing and at the same time reading ... nor any better way to raise children's confidence as learners."

Bissex's (1982) perceptions of conferences and the student and teacher's role in them are similar to Graves'. She too believes that a certain amount of routine in conferences may be necessary to establish expectations, especially about how to start and end conferences. In addition to predictability other desirable features in conferences include keeping the child in charge of his own writing, focusing on the content of the writing first, focusing on one particular skill in an editing conference, and children



choosing to revise voluntarily.

Bissex (1982) believes that the teacher's role is to help the student to clarify his intentions, realize his choices and formulate judgments. Evaluation takes place at the end of the process after the child has had time to explore and clarify what he wishes to say.

Bissex (1982) is convinced that "writing conferences develop more than writing ability. They provide a setting for developing genuine listening skills, and they teach critical reading skills .... The conference is, at heart, a way of teaching that engages the learner in his own learning process."

Based on personal experiences in the classroom, Bridge (1982) and Cadieux (1982) explain how the procedures and questions used in writing conferences are also transferrable to other activities such as drawing and block building. Bridge (1982) feels that conferences which center on a child's drawing can foster composing skills. A process conference can help the child become aware of strategies of learning. In an affective conference the child can be led to make his drawings show more feelings. A focus conference can help the child focus on one aspect of his drawing. An expansion conference can help the child be a better observer. Although Bridge feels that a child's success in drawing will lay the groundwork for later achievement with written language, she also believes that drawing is thinking, and as such, drawing and drawing conferences are justi-



fied in their own right.

Cadieux (1982) uses the same procedures and questions for writing conferences as she does for interacting with children at other learning centers. She feels that her students are not only acquiring those skills expected of them in a traditional readiness program but are also growing in more advanced levels of critical thinking and creativity. Cadieux (1982) also values the individualized instruction which conferences allow.

By allowing children to show us when instruction will be most effective, less time is wasted presenting material to a group at a time when it might be inappropriate or unimportant for particular children. (p.66)

Group and peer conferences have also been the focus of some educators. Both Russel (1983) and Cormack (1981) involved their students in determining changes to their writing programs. Peer conferences played an important part in shaping Russel's program and group conferences in shaping Cormack's.

In summary, it is evident that the research pertaining to conferences has been both meager and diverse. Jacob and Karliner (1977) concluded that the teacher's and student's perceived role in a conference affects the quality of thought in a revised piece of writing. They suggest that teachers should vary their role depending upon the student's need. Freedman (1982,1983) believed that differences in conversational interactions in conferences suggest the possibility of differential instruction. She reasoned that if





conferences were analyzed, teachers could become aware of unconscious subtleties in their interactions and then exert more control over negative aspects of the teaching-learning process. Carnicelli (1980) concluded that students liked the conference method, particularly its individual nature. The psychological value of conferences was also evident in the students' comments. Sowers (1982) described three kinds of responses teachers might use in conferences. Turbill (1982) concluded that the conference approach is the best way to teach writing and at the same time reading and that there is no better way to raise the children's confidence as learners. Bissex's (1981) views about conferences and the teachers' and students' roles in them are similar to Graves' (1982,1983c). Like Turbill (1982), Bissex (1981) sees writing conferences as developing much more than writing ability. She feels that listening and critical reading skills are also developed, and the learner is also involved in his own learning process. Bridge (1982), Cadieux (1982), Russell (1983), and Cormack (1981) reported their personal experiences in the classroom as proof of the effectiveness of conferences.

### Summary

In this chapter past and present trends in writing research were described. The work of Donald Graves was presented with a particular focus on writing conferences. Insights gained from other fields into how conferences might



be conducted were reported. A review of the research on conferences was presented revealing that a very limited number of studies had been carried out. In spite of this fact, writing conferences have become a popular and apparently effective pedagogical tool from elementary to college level.



## CHAPTER THREE

### DESIGN OF THE STUDY

#### Overview

The nature of the study, the method of selection and description of the sample and the techniques and procedures for gathering and analyzing data are reported in this chapter.

#### Nature of the Study

The study is descriptive in nature. The descriptions are based on information gleaned from formal and informal interviews with the six children and three teachers, the researcher's analyses of the twelve videotaped conferences, the researcher's journal and the written compositions of the children.

A case study approach has been used to report the nature of the conferences, the students' and teachers' perceptions of the conferences and background information about the children and the teachers.

#### Sample

##### Selection of Teachers

The proposed design of the study called for teachers who were using individual writing conferences on a regular



basis as part of their writing program. Another criterion was that the teachers would report that they had been using this approach for at least six months. A limited number of possible candidates emerged satisfying both criteria.

A list of fifteen possible contacts from Edmonton and surrounding area was drawn up based on the suggestion of two language arts consultants and university professors. Fourteen of the teachers were either telephoned or spoken to in person. In one case, a school principal made the contact. The nature of the proposed study was explained to the teachers and they were asked about their writing programs and specifically about writing conferences. Three teachers' programs were deemed inappropriate for the purposes of the study because they did not meet the two criteria. The other teachers were asked if they would be interested in taking part in the study. Four teachers expressed no interest and one later withdrew. The researcher then visited six classrooms during February and March to confer with the teachers and to observe their writing conferences. The researcher also talked with students on an informal basis. Two of the teachers were using group conferences exclusively, which did not meet the guidelines of the proposed study. Three teachers were selected for the actual study, and one for the pilot study. Permission to carry out the research in the selected teachers' schools was obtained from the appropriate authorities.





### Selection of Students

Students were selected for the study by the teachers. The criteria for selection given to the teachers were that the students have an ability to verbalize and a willingness to participate. These criteria were deemed necessary since so much of the data would be collected through oral interviews with the children. Because of the small sample and resulting lack of generalizability, no attempt was made to control such variables as age, sex, grade, or writing proficiency.

Each teacher selected two students to participate in the study. Profiles of the students are included in the following chapter. Mrs. Winter and Mrs. Miller (pseudonyms) spoke to the students and the parents about the project. The researcher also sent a letter to the parents of each selected child. The general nature of the study was outlined, and permission for the child to be videotaped and interviewed was sought. Written permission was received from all parents.

### Techniques for Gathering Data

Most of the data was gathered through interviews with students and teachers. The conferences were videotaped and stimulated recall interviews were held with teachers and students. These techniques have been used in a number of studies at the University of Alberta. Searle and Dillon (1983) used interviews and a Repertory Grid Laddering tech-



nique to probe teachers' beliefs about writing instruction. Interviewing was used to discover student's perceptions about writing and how their teachers' responses helped them to write better. Conners (1978) and Tuckwell (1980) used stimulated recall as a means of getting at teacher thought processes. Nolan (1978) used videotape recordings to stimulate the recall of grade six writers' mental activities when composing stories. The researcher also kept a journal in which the proceedings and informal observations were recorded. As well, copies of the children's writing used in the conferences were obtained in order to place the conferences in a more meaningful context.

### Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted over a two-week period in March, 1984. The researcher was able to become familiar with the videotaping equipment. Interview questions and techniques were refined. It was decided that in the actual study three conferences would be videotaped and three stimulated recall interviews conducted, with the first considered a practice session. The researcher also gained insight into how the conferences and interviews might be scheduled. A full description of the pilot study is included in Appendix A.

### Procedures

Figure 1 outlines the procedures used for gathering and



FIGURE 1  
COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

| <u>Procedures</u>                                          | <u>Data</u>                                                                            | <u>Analyses</u>                                                                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| General Interviews                                         | Personal background                                                                    |                                                                                     |
| 1. Interview teachers and students at least twice          | -perceptions of writing<br>-perceptions of conferences in general (audiotape)          | Identify verbatim statements                                                        |
| Pre-Conference Interviews                                  |                                                                                        |                                                                                     |
| 2. Interview teachers and students before each interview   | -perceptions of the purpose, need and expectations of specific conferences (audiotape) | Identify verbatim statements                                                        |
| 3. Videotape conferences                                   | -record of actual conferences (videotape)                                              | -view videotapes for evidence of six elements of scaffolding and any other features |
| Post-Conference Interviews                                 |                                                                                        |                                                                                     |
| 4. Interview teachers and students after each conference   | -perceptions of specific conferences (audiotape)                                       | Identify verbatim statements                                                        |
| Stimulated Recall Interviews                               |                                                                                        |                                                                                     |
| 5. Interview teachers and students using stimulated recall | -perceptions of specific conferences                                                   | Identify verbatim statements                                                        |



analyzing the data.

### 1. Establishing a Rapport

Since most of the data was to be gathered during interviews, the researcher felt that it was important to establish a good rapport with the teachers and students.

The researcher had visited each classroom during the selection of teachers for the study. On a second visit prior to commencing the study, the researcher spent some time in each school videotaping the entire class as they were involved in a variety of tasks. The videotapes were then played back for the children. The researcher also videotaped the performance of some plays the students had written at Bowden Elementary School.

As much as possible, the researcher tried to engage the selected students in informal conversation. These generally occurred prior to the conferences and structured interviews. Informal conversations were also held with the teachers.

### 2. General Interviews

Interviews were held in order to obtain information about the students' and teachers' perceptions of conferences in general. Additional background information was obtained. It was felt that the additional background information helped provide a context within which the conferences would be more meaningful.

The following kinds of data were collected in the general interviews with the children: personal background, perceptions of school, a description of their writing pro-





gram, perceptions of writing, and perceptions of conferences in general. Data collected from the teachers in the general interviews included their professional background, background information on the selected students, a description of their writing program, perceptions of writing and perceptions of conferences. The researcher also outlined the entire project for the student during the first general interview.

All formal interviews were audiotaped. Each teacher and each student was interviewed at least twice, some as many as four times. Except for Mrs. Miller, the first general interview with the students and teachers was held before the practice conference session. Transcripts of the audiotapes were examined after the first interviews and the researcher noted missing information or points requiring explanation or clarification. This provided a focus for subsequent interviews.

### 3. Pre-Conference Interviews

Pre-conference interviews were held in order to obtain information on the teachers' and students' perceptions of specific conferences. The teachers and students were interviewed immediately before each conference and asked what they felt would happen in the conference. Students were generally asked why they were going to have the conference, if they felt a need for it and if they wanted to have one.



#### 4. Videotaping of Conferences

The conferences were videotaped and audiotaped so that the researcher could examine them in detail at a later date. The videotapes were also used for the stimulated recall interviews. Three individual teacher-student conferences were videotaped for each student with the first conference considered a practice session. It allowed the teacher and students an opportunity to become more accustomed to the presence of the researcher and the videotaping equipment.

In one school the videotaping took place in the classroom during the regularly scheduled writing time. In the other school, the videotaping took place in an auxiliary room during writing time.

#### 5. Post-Conference Interviews

Post-conference interviews were held to gather information on the students' and teachers' perceptions of specific conferences. The post-conference interviews with the students usually took place immediately after the videotaping of the two conferences. A few times the interviews were delayed until later in the morning or early afternoon. The post-conference interviews with the teachers took place during the morning or lunch hour following the conference.

Students and teachers were asked what they thought had happened during the conference. Often they included their impressions of the conference.

#### 6. Stimulated Recall Interviews

Each student and each teacher viewed the videotape of



his or her conference on the day following the conference. The videotapes had been studied by the researcher and specific points had been noted. After the first conference, the researcher found that marking the stopping points and questions on the transcripts of the conferences was efficient and effective. During the interview the videotape was stopped at these points for both teacher and student and questions were asked or comments solicited. The student and teachers were reminded several times that they too could stop the videotape at any time. The students did so infrequently. Towards the end of the study, the teachers initiated comments, frequently at the points that the researcher would have stopped the tape. The teachers and students were informed of the purpose of the stimulated recall and most heard the following explanation or an adaptation of it at least twice.

The purpose of watching this videotape is to refresh your memory. I want you to tell me what was happening in the conference, why you said things, why you did things. I want you to tell me why you think \_\_\_\_\_ said things or did things. I want to know what you were thinking, what you were feeling. Tell me everything you can.

Following the viewing of the videotape, the teachers were usually asked what they felt their goals for the conference were, if they thought the conference was successful in terms of the goals, what they saw their role as, what they thought the student's perceptions of the conference were, their impression of the piece of writing and what they



thought the student felt about his composition. Students were generally asked what they thought were the reasons for having the conference and their impressions of their piece of writing.

### 7. Children's Written Compositions

The children's compositions helped to provide a meaningful context in which the conferences took place. Immediately following each conference, a copy of the child's composition was obtained. If the child was in the middle of a piece, previous parts of the composition were also photostated. The teacher provided the researcher with final copies of the child's composition if the child had chosen to continue working on it after the study was over. A sample composition is included in Appendix C.

### 8. Researcher's Journal

The researcher kept a journal in order to supplement the other sources of data. Informal observations and proceedings were recorded.

### Analysis of the Data

1. All of the interviews were transcribed.

2. Transcripts of the general interview were thoroughly examined in order to familiarize the researcher with the data. Verbatim excerpts were identified and used to build a profile of each student and teacher.

3. The videotapes were examined for evidence of the six elements of scaffolding. Other features were also identi-





fied and reported.

4. Transcripts of the students' and teachers' pre- and post- conference interviews and the stimulated recall interviews were examined. Verbatim statements were identified which were used to report the students' and teachers' perceptions of specific conferences. The teachers' and students' goals and general impressions of the conferences were included and when applicable, their perceptions of the six elements of scaffolding. Perceptions of other features were also recorded.

5. The data was analyzed across the cases in reference to the research questions. Information in the case studies was charted in order to identify parallel statements. Emerging patterns amongst the individuals was pointed out. The extent of congruence was determined.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE CASE STUDIES

#### Overview

In this chapter, the data is examined in reference to three teachers and six students in three different situations.

The profiles of the teachers contain the following information: a brief description of the classroom situation, a short summary of the teacher's professional background, a description of the teacher's writing program, and an account of the teacher's perceptions of writing conferences in general. Since Mrs Winter and Mr. Gantry shared the same class, a description of their classroom situation and writing program is presented only once.

The students' case studies are presented in three sections. In the first section, a profile of the student is provided including background information, the student's perceptions of writing, and the student's perceptions of conferences in general. In the second section, the nature of the specific conferences is described. Evidence of the six elements of scaffolding (Graves, 1982, 1983c) is reported as well as other distinguishing features. The third section contains an account of the teacher's and student's perceptions of the specific conferences.



## Profile 1: Mrs. Miller

### Classroom Situation

Midland School is an elementary-junior high community school in an upper middle class neighborhood of a city suburb. Mrs. Miller had thirty-one students in her grade three classroom. However during writing time, the resource room teacher worked on writing with twelve of the students outside of the classroom. Therefore during writing time, there were only nineteen students in Mrs. Miller's class.

### Professional Background

Mrs. Miller had had six years of elementary teaching experience, five at Midland school. This was Mrs. Miller's second year of teaching grade three. She has her B.Sc. in pharmacy, a B. Ed. and a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education. It was during her master's program three years ago that Mrs. Miller became interested in "whole language" and Donald Graves' approach to teaching writing. She has also attended workshops by Bill Martin Jr. and the McCrackens.

### Writing Program

The following description is based on information gained in several interviews with Mrs. Miller. Mrs. Miller stated that her program was based on Donald Graves' approach to writing outlined in his book, Writing: Teachers and Children at Work: "I really agree with the things Donald Graves



says in his book ... so I'm trying to follow that philosophy." Although Mrs. Miller tried using the approach the previous year, she felt that she had not allowed sufficient time for it to be successful.

### The Writing Class

Writing time was scheduled four times a week for forty minutes. During the first 5-10 minutes, Mrs. Miller usually walked around the room holding mini-conferences with those students who required help more frequently. About once a week she used that time to write with the children or to model writing on an overhead projector. The next 15-20 minutes of the writing period was spent conferencing with a group at the back table. There were four writing groups and Mrs. Miller saw one group each writing period. Therefore each student had a conference once a week. Although the entire group sat at the back table, Mrs. Miller conferenced with each one individually. The last 5-10 minutes of the period is a sharing time where children read their stories or parts of them.

### Features of the Program

Mrs. Miller feels that the most important part of the approach is that the children choose their own topics. Referring to what Graves has written, Mrs. Miller stated that voice is the reason for writing. She feels that children





... have to find their voice, be constantly kind of focused in on why they want to write this and to me that takes care of the motivation part of your writing program because you can't write about something you don't know about.

Children are continually writing. When they finish one topic, they go on to the next. Mrs. Miller stated that it was up to the students to decide when they were finished:

There's no preconceived length, you know, of a piece. It's up to them ... except that they must write continually. That's the rule, you know, so as they finish one, they just go on to the next one themselves.

Students were given help with topic choice through sharing.

Mrs. Miller feels that another feature of her program is a focus on ideas rather than skills:

Children are helped more with their ideas. Getting the ideas down and at this age I feel especially just knowing that they can enjoy it... just finish a story and share it. I think that's much more important than the skills specifically.

Skills were taught and worked on in conjunction with publishing "so that there's a reason, not just because they have to learn it." Specific skills were taught on a one-to-one basis in conferences. Mrs. Miller feels that the children are at different levels and that they learn skills better that way:

because they know it's something they need right then and there and then they go and do it for the rest of the story, they practice what you've taught them and we try to keep track of that on their folders.

The children each had a writing folder in which all of their writing was kept. On one cover was a list of all the stories they have written. Those that had been published



were starred. On the inside cover was a list of Future Topics and a list of skills that had been worked on in conferences.

The children had published two books and were about to publish their third. There were plans to publish a fourth book before the end of the year. Published books were typed by parents and bound in wallpaper covers. The children illustrated the books. There were also five "class books" for which children published pieces on their own.

Prior to publishing, Mrs. Miller reviewed a Writer's Checklist posted in the room. Specific points which students were to work on were discussed in the conferences. Several conferences might be held before the piece was ready for publication. Although students might be at different points in the publication process, generally the whole class was working on publishing at the same time.

#### Perceptions of Writing Conferences in General

Mrs. Miller said that she enjoyed conferences. She added, however, that it was "draining" for the teacher and it was sometimes difficult to maintain the necessary high energy level. Students' stories were sometimes boring and it was hard to stay interested. However, she stated that she

wouldn't do it any other way. ... I really get excited sometimes about some of the kids cause I just think you know, the stories they come out with and the excitement they have.



Mrs. Miller thought her students really liked conferences. They asked whose turn it was for conferences, or why they were not having them. "...I think they really like them ... I think it's undivided attention and you know ... the importance of their own writing."

Mrs. Miller views a conference as a chance for the student to talk about his writing and a chance for her to learn "where they're at." Students have an audience for their writing, "someone interested." She said that she usually tried to "feed back quite a bit of what I hear so they know that I'm listening." Mrs. Miller feels very strongly that the students "... have to be the author and the owners of the piece." She therefore tried not to directly state that a child should do something. "I try more to ask questions that'll make them question their own writing or want to make a change or come to a realization."

Mrs. Miller uses conferences because she feels that they are "... individual and personal." She is able to talk about the students' writing and to ask if he's having problems. "I mean everybody's writing is different so I don't see how you can teach the whole class." Another reason for using the approach, she feels, is that she is seeing good results. She feels that the students are definitely writing and are expressing an interest in writing. She also thinks that through their talking, the students realize that they do know a lot of things.

Mrs. Miller thinks that the children feel you are "...



placing an importance on their writing cause you're sitting there and listening to it..." Writing is taken seriously. "... when the teacher spends 5-10 minutes talking to you about what you're doing, it must be important and that's a really important part of it."

Mrs. Miller said that she usually begins a conference by asking how the writing is going. She lets the student talk about his story and then asks a few questions. She ends the conference by asking the student if he has any problems or questions he wishes to ask.

For a conference to be good, Mrs. Miller feels that the child should do most of the talking. The child should feel more in control of it than the teacher. Although she feels she has not been successful with this, Mrs. Miller feels it is really good if the child can indicate what he wants help with.

Mrs. Miller also explained that different conferences had different goals. Therefore different factors would be more important in different situations. A conference at the beginning of a story would be good if it gave the child a chance to explore his ideas through talking. Later in the piece, it would be more important for the teacher to try to find something with which to help the child. Mrs. Miller also felt that the quality of a conference also depended on her being able to pose the right question to help the child.





Case 1: DianeProfileBackground Information

Diane, a cheerful nine-year-old grade three student has attended Midland School since kindergarten. She is the third youngest in a family of seven children. Diane thinks school is "fun" because she "learns lots" and "makes friends." Diane is an avid reader and says she reads more than two hours a day. Diane is an excellent student. Her teacher plans to recommend her for the gifted program. The teacher feels that she is "extremely cooperative, not show-offy" and has many friends.

Diane's teacher feels that her writing demonstrates a very advanced level of skill development for grade three. Her spelling is excellent. She is, however, a cautious writer and sometimes hesitates before writing things down. Diane is also very concerned with the aesthetics of her writing.

Perceptions of Writing

Diane stated during several of the interview sessions that she likes writing. When compared to other writers, she felt that she was "not that good." However, further questioning revealed that she was comparing herself to a writer such as Beverly Cleary. Judged on her own merits, she thought she was "pretty good." Diane also felt that her teacher thought she was a "pretty good writer."



Diane thinks that the key factor in becoming a good writer is the amount of writing one does; that is, the amount of practice one has. Diane ties her own growth in writing to fluency and a move away from personal experience stories. She is also keenly aware of her progress through practice:

When I first started out, I didn't make make-believe stories ... they were just short ones ... I think my writing's getting better now because I write longer stories now and I like them. I think they're better than the ones I used to do.

Diane considers humor and the characters as features of what one might consider a "good" story. A piece of writing might be "poor" if it lacked excitement and contained "unproper" words like "shut-up."

Diane likes to write chapter books and has published several of these based on the bad younger sibling theme. She considers her best piece of writing to be the first book she published. The characters were then new to the audience and thus had greater appeal. Just how precious the first published book can be is reflected in her comment: "... I also think it's kinda special because it's the first book I ever wrote."

Diane is aware of her own particular writing strategies. Rather than having the entire plot sketched in her mind before she begins a piece, ideas come to her as she writes. "Once I usually get started like, an idea comes to my head and I get started then I can just keep on going while I'm writing."



### Perceptions of Writing Conferences in General

Diane said that she liked conferences. If she was having trouble with her writing, Mrs. Miller would know what her story was about and could help her.

Diane views a conference as an individual talk with the teacher in which the student's writing is discussed. Its purpose is to provide the teacher with information about the student's writing. It is also an opportunity for the teacher to help a student with his writing. Conferences are held

because Mrs. Miller wants to know if we're having any problems in writing like if the writing is hard for us or if it's easy, you know we can write a whole story in minute ... Then she probably wants to know what our stories are about."

Diane explained the predictable time, place, and format of conferences. Mrs. Miller sees one group each day at the back table towards the end of the writing period. The group is alerted at the beginning of a period that it is their day for a conference and then later in the period the teacher calls them to the back table. Students are to bring their folders and know which story they're going to talk about. Mrs. Miller talks to one person at a time. The conference usually begins with Mrs. Miller asking the question, "How's it going?" During the conference the teacher also inquires if the student is having any problems and what the particular piece of writing is about. Diane knows that a conference is going to end when she responds "yes" to the question, "Is everything okay?" Students remain at the confer-



ence table and continue to write until the entire group has had their conference. An astute observation by Diane reveals how the predictability of her conferences had made her feel more comfortable with them.

Well, when you can go back there and she asks you how is it going. Well at the beginning when we first started conferencing, I didn't know what she was going to ask us ... So now it's a little bit easier, cause you know ... what she's going to ask you.

Diane feels that Mrs. Miller likes conferences and thinks they're good "... cause then children may be able to think of more things and they won't get stuck." For Diane Mrs. Miller's interest in conferences is self-evident. She commented to the researcher in a rather exasperated voice, "... she's the one who decided we'll have one." In other words, if she didn't like them, she wouldn't have them. As further proof of her teacher's positive feelings about conferences, Diane stated that Mrs. Miller is always happy in conferences, smiling and interested, even if she got up late!

And she's happy at them, and ... even if ... she got up late or something, she's always been good in conferences .... Well she's always smiling and you know it isn't 'Now tell me about your story.' (Diane says this in a low monotone voice.)

According to Diane, both teacher and student bear responsibility for the quality of the conference.

Well the teacher should ask the children questions and the children should tell them what their story's about and how long it's going to be and if they had any problems and when it's going to come to an end.





A conference goes well if students have "good stories" and if they can answer all of the teacher's questions.

"... cause then she knows more about your story and how you're doing with it." Conversely, a conference can be poor

... if the person she's conferencing with doesn't know some questions and they haven't written much since the last conference, then Mrs. Miller really knows all your story except for that one sentence maybe.

However, Diane had had no first-hand experience with a poor conference. She stated that all of hers have been good.

## B. The Nature of Diane's Conferences

### Background

For both conferences, Diane was working on a chapter book about Peter and his mischievous younger brother, Tuggy. In the first conference, she was completing chapter three, in the second conference she had just started part five. Diane had previously published two other chapter books about Peter and Tuggy.

The conferences took place at the back table in the classroom during writing time. The entire group who were to have conferences that day were also seated at the table.

The conferences were examined for the six elements identified by Graves (1982, 1983c).

### Predictability

The time, place and setting for both conferences was



predictable. Each took place at the usual back table at the normal time during a regularly scheduled writing period.

The first conference began with the teacher's predictable opening question, "How's it going?" Diane proceeded into a long description of what her third chapter was about. It was evident that Diane viewed the opening question as a cue for her to talk about her writing. In the second conference, Diane began to talk about her writing as soon as she sat down. The procedure was so predictable she didn't need to rely on the teacher's opening question.

At several points in the first conference Mrs. Miller received information Diane told her, that is she repeated the information. Receiving, which is a predictable conference structure, was evident to a lesser extent in the second conference.

Two other predictable structures observed in both conferences were the following questions, or slight variations of "What's going to happen next?" and "Do you have any questions?" The latter question ended both conferences.

### Focus

In the first conference, Mrs. Miller helped Diane focus on a particular problem in her narrative. Through questioning, she helped Diane see that important information was missing.

In the second conference, Mrs. Miller focused on the brackets and boxed-in headings in Diane's piece. These were



features that Diane had not previously used in her writing. Mrs. Miller helped Diane to focus on her writing process by asking her why she had used them and how she had learned about them.

Other questions Mrs. Miller asked also focused on Diane's writing process.

Mrs. Miller: How will you get your ideas?

Diane: Oh, probably after I start writing, as I said before, ideas just come into my head and then I write them down so I don't forget any.

Mrs. Miller: How will you know when you're finished (your story)?

Diane: Well it sort of just comes to an end. Cause I keep on writing and I kind of get tired of writing the same story so I just write about a page more and I ... do something that will show that it's ending and then I end it.

It is evident that Diane is very much aware of her own writing process.

### Demonstrable Solutions

At no point in either conference did the teacher tell Diane what she should or must do. In the first conference, through questions, she led Diane to realize that some information was missing. But then she left it up to Diane to explain what might be done to rectify the situation. Diane's workable solution was accepted by the teacher.

In the second conference, Diane explained how she taped a piece of paper to the bottom of her page in order to indicate the missing information. Mrs. Miller accepted



Diane's workable solution. She also demonstrated some other possibilities which Diane might consider in the future. In the second conference, Mrs. Miller also provided some instruction in the use of brackets.

### Role Reversal

There were many instances in both conferences where Diane initiated comments. Examples of her comments in the first conference include the need for no further brainstorming, the number of chapters she wanted, and why she had marked an 'X' beside some ideas on her brainstorming list.

Diane began the second conference without the aid of an opening question. When there was a slight pause in the conversation, Diane informed Mrs. Miller that "It's going pretty good. I haven't got any problems." She had anticipated the predictable question and filled the pause in the conference. Diane also informed Mrs. Miller that because she wanted to add more chapters, she would not be the first person to get their book published. She added that at least it would be done the way she wanted it to be.

### Nomenclature

In both conferences, Diane spoke of using brainstorming. It is evident that she is able to use this strategy effectively. In the first conference, she explained how she would use her brainstorming list to help her decide what to write next in her story.





And then I'll have to look at my brainstorming list and see what I was writing, but I don't have to do any more brainstorming cause I already have lots ... I don't need any more till I use up most of the ideas.

She showed Mrs. Miller how she had marked an 'X' beside those ideas which were not appropriate for that section of her story. She explained how she added to her list as ideas came into her head.

Diane indicated during the first conference how she could include missing information by writing it at the bottom of the page and drawing an arrow to indicate where it should go.

There were further opportunities in the second conference for Diane to use and learn about the language of writing within the context of her own piece. She and Mrs. Miller talked about brackets, boxed-in headings, and the number of chapters she would include in her story. Some questions focused on Diane's writing process, for example, how she got her ideas and how she ended a piece.

#### Humor or Playfulness

Other than smiles and nods, there was no evidence of playfulness or humor in the first conference. In the second conference, Mrs. Miller drew attention to a sentence in the story which Diane obviously thought was funny. Mrs. Miller also appeared to be amused.



### Other Features

The atmosphere in both conferences was very relaxed and supportive. It was obvious that Diane and Mrs. Miller felt comfortable with each other and the situation. Both appeared poised and confident. Both listened intently to each other. There was a smooth flow to the conference. The teacher's questions followed logically from the student's comments.

Diane's ownership of her writing was very evident in both conferences. Her papers were set directly in front of her. It was Diane who handled them, pointed out things on them, and wrote on them. She thought of possible solutions to problems. She made decisions about how her story would unfold and how many chapters she would have. Her decisions were accepted unequivocally by the teacher.

The other striking feature of the conferences was the focus on Diane's writing process. Through her questions Mrs. Miller tried to bring Diane's knowledge of her writing process to a conscious level. Her questions also fit very naturally into the context of the conference and the piece of writing.

In summary, there was evidence of all six elements of scaffolding in Diane's conferences, as well as other distinguishing features.



### C. Perceptions of Specific Conferences: Diane and Mrs. Miller

Both Diane and Mrs. Miller felt the conferences were good. Diane stated that she liked having them although she really couldn't say why. "Well, I just like having conferences ..."

Diane also felt a little nervous about the video equipment during the first conference. "Well, I felt good that I was having a conference and kind of nervous too that I was being taped."

Mrs. Miller stated, "It was a good conference I think, I was happy with it." In each case, she felt that major goals had been realized. In the first conference, these included:

... for (Diane) to have a chance to talk about her writing, and for me to listen, to be a good listener, provide a mirror for her to keep her oriented on the story, for her to explore her ideas, to share them with me, ask any questions if she wanted to, for her to ... reveal her plan kind of to me.

Second conference goals were similar. Mrs. Miller felt that Diane knew where she was going in her story and had some realistic expectations concerning publication of her piece. She also felt that Diane had maintained control of her writing. One of Mrs. Miller's major concerns is that the child retain ownership of his writing. She stated that part of her role in a conference was "... looking for something I can teach, some way I can help them, but still have them retain ownership of the story and make the decisions."

Diane felt that the conferences gave Mrs. Miller an



opportunity to see how she was doing and to check if she had any problems. Initially it appeared that Diane and Mrs. Miller saw the goals for conferences only in terms of the other person. However, Diane later mentioned that the conferences also helped her with ideas. "Well, cause when I read somebody my story, then it helps me write more cause I kind of get more ideas and I don't get stuck as much."

Prior to the first conference, Diane did not see a personal need for it. After the conference, she felt differently.

... Before we had the conference I thought I really didn't need it but then I think maybe I did need it after all, after we had had it ... because well just of her asking the questions it kinda gave me more ideas.

Mrs. Miller and Diane had similar perceptions of what some of the predictable structures entailed. In the second conference Diane immediately began to talk about her story, without waiting for an opening question. Diane explained, "I usually tell her all my story." Mrs. Miller was aware that Diane had anticipated the question.

So she started already without me (laughs). Diane went right ahead into the conference there. I didn't ask the usual questions. Oh, she's anticipating, you know she doesn't really need it (the opening question).

Mrs. Miller also felt that because of the predictability of the conference structures, Diane initiated the comment that she was having no problems and didn't need to do more brainstorming.

She's anticipating again. Cause usually I ask





when I think that they're, you know, finished. Is there any problems or anything you want to ask me, so she's anticipating that question.

Diane had anticipated the question. She said that she made the comment "cause sometimes Mrs. Miller wants to know if we're stuck on our writing, if we have to do some more brainstorming."

Although Diane understood what was happening when Mrs. Miller received her piece, she did not understand all of the rationale behind it. She felt Mrs. Miller received her story in order to show her that she had really been listening. "Well, I think it's kind of to show me that she was listening and so she's telling me my story, repeating it." Mrs. Miller said that she was

... providing a mirror again, just to keep her oriented on it, to show her I'm being a good audience. She's looking at me if you'll notice now instead of looking at the paper. So she is, you know, listening to see if I was listening.

In the first conference, Mrs. Miller focused on some missing information in Diane's narrative. Diane clearly understood why Mrs. Miller hadn't told her it was important information to include.

Cause it's, well, she didn't say that because it's my story and she probably wanted to know if I'm leaving it out or if I didn't know that I was going to put it in or if I had forgotten about it.

Mrs. Miller had similar perceptions about ownership.

... I wanted it to be her choice ... well, I want her to be the owner of the story ... it should be her decision. She's the author. If she didn't think it was important to the story, it could be that maybe it's not. You know it's not essential ... It has to be their decision.



Mrs. Miller's inquiry as to how she could indicate the missing information was, Diane felt, a check to see if previously taught strategies were assimilated. "She's asking me what I'm going to do to add it in, cause she's told us before and she probably wants to see if we remembered how to do it."

Diane's assumption was accurate. Mrs. Miller stated that she wanted to know what Diane's strategy was. She had modelled the use of the strategy but some kids "... don't always know how to do that." Diane solved the problem by taping a piece of paper to the bottom of her page. She correctly felt that Mrs. Miller thought this was a good idea. It "... was fine, it was her own solution to the problem." Mrs. Miller also felt that she had used this instance in the conference as a teaching situation, providing Diane with alternate methods of adding information.

Mrs. Miller focused on the boxed-in headings and brackets in Diane's second conference. Diane was not surprised. She thinks Mrs. Miller is very perceptive.

Well, cause usually she notices different things in people's writing ... Well, cause I've never put blocks around my words and so she probably just wanted to know how I got my idea.

Mrs. Miller did say she that was curious to know where Diane had got the idea to use brackets and boxed-in headings. She also wanted to let Diane know that she had noticed and liked the headings. She was conscious of focusing Diane on her writing process, "... just to kinda ... let her know where she gets her ideas from."



Although Diane had used the brackets correctly she wasn't able to verbalize what their function was. Mrs. Miller wanted to extend Diane's knowledge about the use of brackets. She pointed out to the researcher how Diane demonstrated ownership of her writing.

She is really showing ownership here because she takes right over, like she takes her pencil and she erases those brackets and she shows me how ... it would look if you didn't do it. She really shows that she's the owner of the writing there.

Mrs. Miller was aware that some of her other questions required Diane to focus on her writing process. When Diane responded to the question about how she got her ideas she was "... revealing the process that she uses." At this point in the stimulated recall interview Mrs. Miller commented on the differences in Darren and Diane's writing processes.

She's quite different than (Darren), I think. I think she gets her ideas as she writes, whereas Darren really plans his story all out in his head first and then puts it down on paper where she more or less tries things out I think on paper.

Mrs. Miller asked Diane how she ended a story. "I just wonder what her concept is ... of ending a story ..." Mrs. Miller felt that Diane's response was a very good, mature answer for a grade three student.

Diane felt that Mrs. Miller asked her about ending a story because they were going to publish soon and "... cause sometimes people in our class don't know when they're finished or how they're going to end and I know how to end." These comments show an awareness of the problem other stu-



dents have as well as an awareness of her own writing process.

In the stimulated recall interview Diane reiterated her thoughts on publishing.

... I don't think it's the speed that counts or how fast you get your book done. I mean you want to get it done as soon as possible but it really isn't a race so I don't care if I'm the very last person to get it published.

Mrs. Miller felt that Diane's comments about publishing revealed her high standards. "She's revealed her standards again there that she doesn't mind waiting and doing a good job of it."

### Summary

Mrs. Miller and Diane had positive feelings about the conferences. Two of their purposes for conferences were similar. Each tended to view these purposes in terms of the other person. Diane and Mrs. Miller had similar perceptions of some of the predictable structures in the conferences. Each was aware that Diane had initiated some comments anticipating a predictable question. Diane and Mrs. Miller had similar ideas concerning the ownership of Diane's writing. Both felt Diane was responsible for making decisions about the story and both felt that Diane's solution to adding information was good. Diane and Mrs. Miller were aware of the focus on Diane's writing process. Through the conferences, Mrs. Miller obtained a great deal of information about Diane's writing process and her development.





Case 2: DarrenProfileBackground Information

Darren, a talkative nine-year-old grade three student has always attended Midland School. He is the oldest of three children.

Darren's teacher stated that his achievement was average to above average. His vocabulary is excellent as is his participation in classroom discussions. Mrs. Miller also described Darren as very creative, cooperative and a little high-strung.

Mrs. Miller felt that Darren's writing shows a fairly advanced level of skill development for grade three. He has good ideas and excellent vocabulary choices. Sentence structure is good and spelling is above average.

Perceptions of Writing

Darren stated several times during the interviews that "... I enjoy writing ... Writing's pretty fun ..." Darren said that he liked writing make-believe stories. He thought that choosing your own topic makes "... you feel kind of important, kind of that you get to do your own thing."

Darren thought that he was a "pretty good" writer "... cause I can do a lot of things that other kids can't do ..." He felt that Mrs. Miller thought he was "a pretty good writer" because two of his stories had been published in the Community Newsletter. Darren felt that in order to become a



better writer he should "fix up" his stories. He is well aware that revision is sometimes tedious.

"... like if I would take the time to fix it up it'd, could be a real good story. Sometimes I don't do that, I'm, I'm lazy sometimes and I don't like doing that."

Darren is also aware that every story needn't be revised. "Sometimes I don't (revise) cause ... it's not a good story or whatever ... it's not even, it's not the best topic."

Darren feels that a piece of writing is good "... if it keeps the person's interest." He identified one student as a good writer because she included details in her story. Comedy is also a feature that Darren feels makes a story good. He cited three stories as being his best pieces of writing "... because they each have a little bit of comedy in it."

Darren is very knowledgeable about his writing process. He explained that he has the whole story planned in his head before he starts to write.

when I finish the story that I have you know written like I usually have a great idea for the next one ... and I just keep going like it's a big long streak, you know, and so it's like I have every little move planned in my head.

Darren mentioned several times that he needed and liked a lot of time to write.

Not only is Darren aware of his own writing process, he is also perceptive enough to realize that writers are different. He noticed that Diane did not have her whole story planned in advance. "So it's kinda funny how other people,



you know, like their thinking ... it's like (my) thinking's over with ..."

### Perceptions of Writing Conferences in General

Darren said that he liked conferences. He cited three reasons. Mrs. Miller asked him a lot of questions, it was interesting to find out what other students were writing and he picked up ideas from the teacher and the other students. Darren felt that Mrs. Miller also liked conferences -- even if she had a lot of work to do.

... well she has a lot of work to be done and she might be too busy but I'm sure she likes them cause she likes to find out what her kids are doing you know. It's kinda her classroom and what her kids are doing.

Darren views a writing conference as a time when the teacher asks questions about your writing. "... It's just asking about your story and what you're writing about now and what you might write about later." The roles are sometimes reversed. "Sometimes I ask her questions if I'm having trouble but usually she has a lot of questions, the same old thing you know." Writing conferences are held because "... the teacher likes to know what we're writing."

Darren explained that the writing conferences take place at the back table after the "... kids get settled with their files," about the middle of writing time. Students have been placed in conference groups and the entire group goes to the back table. The groups which combine students from different tables remain constant. Mrs. Miller alerts



the group before writing time starts that it is their day for a conference. Other than that the groups don't know when they're going to have a conference. Students bring their pencil, eraser, and writing file to the conference. All students remain at the table until everyone has had their conference. Darren wasn't sure how often he had a conference but thought about once every week and a half. He explained that sometimes the teacher forgot and sometimes music class interfered. It is evident that Darren finds the setting and format of conferences predictable.

Darren also found many of his teacher's questions predictable including the opening and closing structures. He differentiated between conferences by talking about what might transpire if a student didn't know what to write about or if he was in the middle of a story. In a role play of a conference Darren included some predictable questions and one which would leave ownership of the writing with the student. Darren also expected other students to find conferences predictable. "... and the kids know what a conference is now ... since they've been in a conference quite a few times."

Darren felt that the quality of a conference depended on the teacher asking a lot of challenging questions and the student having written a sufficient amount. "... What makes a conference good is a whole bunch of questions and things like that."

A poor conference was "... more depending on the children





because if you haven't written anything it's just going to be the same questions as before the last conference."

## The Nature of Darren's Conferences

### Background

For the first conference, Darren was working on an adventure story entitled, "Super Spike." It was a fairly long story and he had written a lot since the practice conference the week before. In the second conference, two pieces of writing were discussed, "Super Spike" and "Garfield." Darren had added only two sentences to his "Super Spike" story since the last conference. "Garfield" was a ten-part story Darren had started in November. He now wished to prepare it for publishing, and so the latter part of the conference centered on that.

The conferences took place in the classroom during writing time. Other students in the group who were to have a conference that day were also seated at the table.

The conferences were examined for evidence of the six elements of scaffolding identified by Graves.

### Predictability

Both conferences were held at the back table at the usual time in a regularly scheduled writing period. Thus the time, place and setting for both conferences was predictable.

There were also predictable structures. Each conference



began with the predictable question, "How's it going (Darren)?" This obviously was a cue for Darren to talk about his writing. In the first conference he launched into a long description of what he had written and what his future plans were. In the first conference, he appeared to have anticipated the question, "What will happen next?" In the second conference, Darren's responses indicted that he was floundering somewhat and had no clear-cut idea of what to do next.

There were several incidents of the teacher receiving information in each of the conferences. Receiving is a predictable structure in Mrs. Miller's conferences. Another predictable structure ended the conferences with Mrs. Miller checking to see if everything was all right. "... Do you have any questions you'd like to ask me? Any problems you think you might have? All right?"

### Focus

There was a clear focus to the first conference. Mrs. Miller was trying to help Darren come to terms with what would happen next in his story. Mrs. Miller gave him an opportunity to talk about his ideas. He seemed to go off on tangents as he talked about the many possibilities. By asking several key questions and receiving his information, Mrs. Miller tried to keep him focused. The question, "So what do you think your story is turning out to be about?" required Darren to think about the main idea of his story.



By receiving, Mrs. Miller brought several of Darren's ideas into focus.

Okay so Darren, I see you have lots of ideas for this ... some of your ideas are um, you know, that he might stay the same super hero or he might change back to the old man, have a peace plan.

The first part of the second conference dealt with Darren's Super Spike story. Mrs. Miller tried to get Darren to focus on what he would do next. It was evident that Darren was unsure of how to proceed. "Well, I was thinkin but there's so many ideas I keep on gettin more. I'm not sure which one's good enough, you know." Mrs. Miller changed the focus of the conference by asking Darren which story he wanted to publish. Darren revealed that he had started to work on publishing his Garfield story. Mrs. Miller focused on capitalization and punctuation as skills which Darren should concentrate his efforts on next.

In each conference, Mrs. Miller helped Darren focus on his writing process. For example, in the first conference she asked him, "How will you know which of these ideas to put in your story?" In the second conference, she asked, "Could you tell me how it is that you decide to put in periods?"

#### Demonstrable Solutions

Through Mrs. Miller's questions in the first conference, Darren was able to come up with two possible strategies he could employ. These included brainstorming and writing several drafts.

I think well for one thing I could write a whole



bunch of ideas on a piece of paper and then I could see which one I like best.

I'll probably continue with my writing and see how it goes... And then if I don't like the idea in the middle of the story, wherever um, I can change it ... maybe write a better ending.

Darren's decision to continue with his writing was accepted by Mrs. Miller.

During the second conference, Mrs. Miller suggested a strategy to deal with "writer's block." Darren was confused about how to proceed with his Super Spike story and had decided he wanted to publish his Garfield story. Mrs. Miller suggested he leave the Super Spike story for awhile and return to it later.

So maybe that is a good idea, just leave Super Spike alone for awhile. Sometimes that helps ... And you can think about it ... And when you're finished publishing Garfield, then you can go back to Super Spike if you want to.

Mrs. Miller was more directive in the second part of the conference since it was evident that Darren was not approaching his proofreading in any systematic way. Mrs. Miller suggested he work on the checking of end of sentence punctuation first. Darren was given an opportunity to practice with several sentences and some direct teaching took place at that time. Mrs. Miller also reminded Darren of a strategy to use if he was unsure of the correct punctuation.

That's right, if you come to a place where you think you're not sure a period should go, put a little square like this if you can't decide... and then I can help you ....





### Role Reversal

Darren was very involved and talkative in both conferences. He talked at length about his story anticipating some of Mrs. Miller's questions and initiating many comments. He frequently interrupted Mrs. Miller by interjecting comments.

### Nomenclature

There were examples in each conference where Darren used or learned terminology specific to writing. In the first conference, Darren talked about how he could list his ideas. Mrs. Miller provided him with the label. "That's called brainstorming." Darren also talked about parts of a story. One of his first comments was "... I think I've got a good enough starting for it ...". He also talked about the middle and the end of a story.

In the second conference, Darren explained that he hadn't written much but that he had been thinking and planning ahead. Evidently he sees this as an important part of the writing process. Darren and Mrs. Miller's talk about publishing showed that he was aware of what publishing entailed. He mentioned that he had been "fixin up some mistakes."

He mentioned capitals, periods, question marks, exclamation marks, and checking in the dictionary for spelling. Both Mrs. Miller and Darren used terminology in reference to the form and the content of writing.



### Humor or Playfulness

There was an example of humor or playfulness in each conference. Both Darren and Mrs. Miller laughed at a humorous point in Darren's story during the first conference. Darren provided some levity in the second conference when he exaggerated how a sentence with an exclamation mark would be read.

### Other Features

The atmosphere in both conferences was very supportive. It was obvious that Mrs. Miller had established an excellent rapport with Darren. Darren appeared to be a little excited and nervous, particularly near the beginning. He usually played with something in his hands and sometimes made jerky head movements.

In contrast to the first conference, Darren appeared to have lost control of his story in the second conference. The researcher felt that in order to reestablish his control, Mrs. Miller was much more directive in the second conference.

In the first conference, Darren appeared to be quite proud of his progress. He seemed confident that he could proceed with his story without difficulty. At the beginning of the second conference, Darren appeared to be floundering. He had so many ideas and was unable to make a decision about which ones to use. Even his voice suggested frustration.



Mrs. Miller seemed to sense his frustration and turned to the publishing topic. She accepted his decision to publish his Garfield story and suggested he leave his Super Spike story alone for awhile. Since Darren's proof reading strategies appeared to be somewhat haphazard, Mrs. Miller suggested that he check for end of sentence punctuation first of all.

An interesting feature of Darren's conferences was the extent to which he revealed his knowledge of writing and of his own writing process. It is evident that Darren has assimilated some of the strategies modelled in the classroom. His comments suggest a knowledge of the brainstorming procedure and of revision both for content and mechanics. He is aware of story structure and mentioned beginning, middle and end. Darren showed an awareness of audience, it being a factor in deciding which idea to choose "... maybe it'd be better to keep the person's interest..." He revealed his high standards and his need to feel unhurried.

... I was really thinking cause I wanted to get a real good idea that would sort of fit in with the story.

... I didn't publish Super Spike. I didn't have well, enough time ... kinda be a rush I like having lots of time ...

... and once I've got my story sort of I want it perfect.

#### Perceptions of Specific Conferences: Darren and Mrs. Miller

Both Darren and Mrs. Miller have positive feelings about the conferences. Each felt the other person enjoyed it too.



Darren:           She must have enjoyed it. She enjoys conferences. I know that.

Mrs. Miller: I think he was happy with it.

Darren felt the conferences were "fun." He said he liked to find out what other kids were writing about. Although Darren did not feel he needed the first conference, he definitely wanted to have one and thought Mrs. Miller would too.

Well, she'll be pretty anxious to find out what I've been writing and I, like, once I've written a lot, it's kind of fun to tell people how much I've written and things.

Darren also thought that the second conference provided Mrs. Miller with an opportunity to find out about his writing. Alluding to the researcher's inquisitiveness, he commented, "She's kinda like you ... like she wants to find out quite a bit about my writing."

Darren thought that Mrs. Miller might be able to help him because he hadn't written that much. He was also nearing the end of his story and he said that he usually had a conference at the beginning, middle, and end of his story.

Darren was correct in assuming that Mrs. Miller would want to hear about his writing and his plans. Mrs. Miller's goals for the conferences included giving Darren an opportunity to talk about his story in order to become aware of his problems, helping Darren make decisions, receiving Darren's story so that he could stay oriented, teaching him new skills and finding out where he's at in the publishing





process. Throughout all of this, Mrs. Miller wanted to make sure that Darren maintained control of his piece of writing.

Darren and Mrs. Miller had similar perceptions for most of the predictable structures in the conferences. Both perceived the opening question, "How's it going (Darren)?" as a predictable cue for Darren to talk about his writing.

Darren: ... she wants to know what I'm writing about ... She wants to know how it's coming along.

She asked me, "How's it going, Darren?" first question always the same thing.

Mrs. Miller: (It's) just the opening of the conference, my standard question ... just to get the conference started to open it, to let him know I'm ready to listen and uh for him to focus on telling me about his writing as opposed to reading it.

Knowing what was expected of him, Darren talked about his writing. "I wanted to let her know about my story instead of making her go to all the trouble of asking me a whole bunch of questions and things." Mrs. Miller is aware that Darren answered many of the questions she might have asked. "...He was very talkative today. I didn't even have to ask questions. He basically took over the interview."

Although Darren understood what was happening when Mrs. Miller received his piece, "... repeating what I said in kinda different words," he did not know why she received it. Mrs. Miller's reasons included "providing a mirror for him, what I heard him say, to try to keep him oriented on the story, show that I'm listening."



Darren and Mrs. Miller's perceptions were similar for the closing structure. In the first conference, Mrs. Miller was checking to see if he had any questions or problems and in the second she was checking to see if he thought her suggestion was all right. Both were conscious of his retaining ownership.

Mrs. Miller: I think it should be their choice of where to go but I think he is now happy with it.

Darren: Maybe I don't want to but -- okay is that all right with you, you know. She probably knows it is but, you know, okay, is that all right.

Sometimes Darren's and Mrs. Miller's perceptions of focus points in the conferences were similar, other times they were quite different. Darren understood that the predictable question, "What's going to happen next?" was to help him focus. He explained how in the previous conference he had told Mrs. Miller a lot of ideas "... so now she's asking, 'So out of all that, you know, what's your plan?'..."

Mrs Miller put it this way: "So I'm just trying to focus him in on, ... you know, get him to verbalize what his plans are for that story."

In the first conference, Darren had related several possible ideas he could use. Mrs. Miller asked him what his story was turning out to be about. She wanted "... to make sure that he's got one main idea ... I was kinda getting him to think about the main idea of the story."

In this case, Darren's perceptions were different. He



did not really understand why she had asked him that as he thought he had already told her what his story was about. He guessed that maybe "... she wanted to know ... like how is it coming along."

In the second conference, Mrs. Miller felt that Darren had lost control of his Super Spike story.

I think he kind of lost control of it. He doesn't know where to go from here and he's got so many ideas and he doesn't know what to do next and he's spending a lot of time thinking and not getting too much down on paper.

Mrs. Miller changed the focus of the conference entirely by asking Darren if he had decided what he wanted to publish. She had been discussing publishing in the classroom. "So now I want him to focus on what decision he's made on that."

Darren too recognized that she was having him focus on publishing "... like most people are getting ready to publish kind of, and so she said, um, okay, what are you going to publish?"

Although Mrs. Miller had not indicated any preference Darren felt that she wanted him to publish Super Spike. "I think she wants me to publish Super Spike but I kinda don't have the time to finish it off." He understood though that it was up to him. "Oh yeah, we get to make the decision."

Sometimes Darren and Mrs. Miller had similar understandings of the suggestions Mrs. Miller offered. Sometimes their perceptions were quite different. They did have similar understandings of the strategy Mrs. Miller suggested in order to deal with Darren's problems with his Super Spike



story. She suggested he leave it alone for awhile and concentrate on publishing his Garfield story.

Darren: ... she's kinda like my mom in some ways too, cause ... when I'm stuck on a piano piece she says "maybe you could leave that piece till tomorrow and practice this other one" and so Mrs. Miller is sorta like she's saying um like maybe you could work on this one and then ... you can go back to that one and finish it off.

Mrs. Miller: Well I think that sometimes it does help when you're stuck in a story to leave it, put it aside for awhile and come back to it fresh ..."

Darren stated in the conference and in the stimulated recall interview that he had started work on publishing Garfield by going over spelling, punctuation and his printing. Mrs. Miller really didn't think that he had.

He said question marks, periods, and all that but I think what he really was focusing on there is the messy printing and you could see where he's gone over some words and made them neater.

Darren's comments indicate that he understood Mrs. Miller's explanation about exclamation marks and her strategy for indicating the spelling and punctuation he was unsure of. He was also aware of Mrs. Miller's teaching style. "Well she wants me to learn you know. Teacher kind of wants you to learn ... other people tell you everything, so she wanted me to figure it out."

Mrs. Miller's reason for teaching the strategy reflects her knowledge of Darren's writing style. She commented that the idea was to keep the children writing rather than sitting there thinking.





Darren's like that, he's kind of a perfectionist and he probably would sit there forever on one sentence trying to decide if he should have a period or not, so if he's not sure then I can help him later.

In the first conference, Darren had suggested brainstorming as a solution to a possible problem. Mrs. Miller recognized his suggestions and drew implications about his writing process from it.

Well, he's talking about brainstorming there; ... which I didn't suggest. He kind of came up with that on his own although we did talk about doing that at the beginning of his story last time which he didn't do. So I don't really think he will do that. I think he's the kind of writer that will try his ideas out as he goes along. But it is a prop, he is aware of that strategy, that he can use that strategy.

Many of Mrs. Miller's questions helped Darren to focus on his writing process. From his responses, Mrs. Miller learned a lot about Darren's writing process and his writing development. Darren's responses revealed that he was often keenly aware of his own process.

Mrs. Miller asked Darren what he was going to write next. He said that he was going to think for a bit first and then put one of his ideas down.

Darren: ... when I don't have a very good idea, I start thinking again. when I have a bunch of ideas, I write one of them down and then decide if I like it or not ...

Mrs. Miller: ...so he said he was going to think first not write. So I think he's revealed his strategy there. He thinks about it, he tries it out, puts it down and tries it out.

Mrs. Miller asked Darren how he would decide on which



idea to include in his story. Darren understood the question. "... She's asking like how will you know if you're gonna put this or that down?" Darren cited "...keep(ing) the person's interest" as his criteria. Mrs. Miller recognized his criteria "...so I guess one way for him he feels that he'll know what to use to keep the audience's interest, best to keep their interest."

Mrs. Miller asked Darren what he would do if he didn't like the idea he put down "...so I would kinda know what his ideas are there on process, his development kind of." Darren wasn't sure why Mrs. Miller had asked him the question but his guess was accurate: "...maybe to find out more about my writing." He hinted that the researcher's question was unfair. "I don't know exactly what the teacher is thinking..."

Darren misunderstood Mrs. Miller's reasons for asking him how he decided where a period should go. Mrs. Miller stated that she wanted to check that he had a good grasp of sentences. Darren however felt that he was perhaps doing something wrong.

Maybe I'm doing something wrong. Maybe like, sometimes I get mixed up, like in Grade 2 I got mixed up with periods, uh question marks, exclamation marks, commas, everything.

Comments which Darren initiated also revealed his writing process. Darren explained why he chose not to publish his Super Spike story in the conference and again to the researcher. "I don't have time to finish it off. I like



lots of time to do writing .... Well I already told you that I like to have lots of time for my writing." Mrs. Miller recognized what Darren was saying: "... he just told us he didn't like to feel pressured."

Mrs. Miller also gained insight into Darren's writing development from his comment that he liked to have his story perfect.

He's got high standards for himself ... he realized that publishing is for your best piece and you don't just publish any old thing you write ... it shows he cares, he cares about your audience, he cares about his writing. And I think that's really good.

Darren expanded on his comment in the stimulated recall interview, showing a concern for audience.

I usually read my writing like I want to know if it's interesting ... kinda want to keep the person's interest. I want to keep it interesting instead of like a long boring story.

Darren also revealed to the researcher some fascinating information about the source of some of his ideas and expressions for writing. Darren felt that his dad was a key source: "... and so I kind of get a lot of things from my dad." Darren said that he used the expression, "For a minute there I thought" because his dad always said that when he was fishing. "For a minute there I thought I had one on the line." Darren explained that when he wrote about Super Spike "wopping" the bomb back he was thinking of golfing "... cause when I'm watching on the golf course and they say 'What a hit!' and it flies through the air." He was also thinking, he said, of the Superman movie. Darren



also drew on his personal experience for the name of the store in his story. He had just colored a picture for a Super A store contest.

Darren also explained that when he writes he thinks of professional writers such as Judy Blume. "... She kinda puts things like that in ... like the details. Cause I'm always thinking about professional writers and I kind of wanta copy them."

### Summary

Both Darren and Mrs. Miller had positive feelings about the conferences. Two of their goals or reasons for the conferences were similar. Their perception of most of the predictable structures were also similar. Sometimes Mrs. Miller and Darren had similar perceptions of focus points and suggested strategies and solutions, though at other times their perceptions were quite different. They had similar perceptions of some humor in Darren's story. Darren's comments and responses to questions revealed considerable information about his writing process and development. The researcher also obtained information about the source of his ideas and expressions.

### Profile 2: Mrs. Winter

### Profile 3: Mr. Gantry

### Classroom Situation

Bowden Elementary School is in a mixed socio-economic





neighborhood of a large city. There were twenty-six students in Mrs. Winter's grade four class. Students ranged from below average to average in achievement. High achieving students had been placed in a split grade 4-5 class.

Although Mrs. Winter is the classroom teacher, Mr. Gantry has spent a great deal of time in the classroom working with children during writing period. Mr. Gantry and Mrs. Winter had been introduced to Donald Graves' approach to writing through writing inservices. Prior to school commencing in September of 1983, they planned and structured a writing program for Mrs. Winter's class based on Graves' work.

Mr. Gantry was on sabbatical leave and the planning, implementation and evaluation of this writing program was part of an independent study course he was taking at the university. Mr. Gantry spent approximately four mornings a week in the classroom prior to Christmas. From February to the end of the study he spent approximately two mornings a week in the classroom. Mr. Gantry also went on several field trips with the class and substituted whenever Mrs. Winter was away. Prior to his sabbatical, Mr. Gantry had taught at Bowden for four years. He felt that he had developed a fairly close relationship with the students in Mrs. Winter's class.

Professional Background: Mrs. Winter

Mrs. Winter has seventeen years of teaching experience



in the elementary grades. This is her second year of teaching at the grade four level.

Mrs. Winter has a B.Ed. with a major in Early Childhood Education. She has been active in language arts circles, attending CEL workshops and a number of inservices offered by the system throughout the years. Last year Mrs. Winter was introduced to Donald Graves' work during a series of writing inservices. She then read his book "thoroughly" and "religiously."

#### Professional Background: Mr. Gantry

Mr. Gantry has eight years of teaching experience, seven at the grade six level and one at the grade five level.

Mr. Gantry has a science and outdoor education background. He has attended CEL workshops and writing inservices. Mr. Gantry was on sabbatical this year working on his graduate diploma in language arts. He expressed an interest in Graves' work which he feels has provided him with a structure for a writing program. Mr. Gantry gave several inservices to teachers in the system describing his and Mrs. Winter's writing program.

#### Writing Program

Information for the following program description was obtained through interviews with Mrs. Winter and Mr. Gantry.

Mr. Gantry's goals for the program included getting the



child to develop a sense of authorship and to feel good about writing. "... to get the child really feeling good about it." Writing a lot was also important. "... We learn by doing so writing every day and writing a lot."

Mrs. Winter felt that students were

... writing every day in order to develop fluency and feel ... comfortable with ... writing, to learn that they are capable as writers, that they don't have to have somebody showing them everything and telling them everything, that they can communicate through writing and that others in the class have skills that can help them.

### The Writing Class

Mrs. Winter and Mr. Gantry's program was based on Donald Graves' book, Writing: Teachers and Children at Work. The structure of their writing class, which both felt was a writing workshop, is similar to that described in Graves' book.

Writing time was scheduled daily for approximately thirty-five minutes. During the first few minutes of the period, the teacher wandered around the room checking to see where the children were in their writing and if they had any problems. The teacher sometimes had a "mini-conference" with a student at this time. Mrs. Winter:

At that time I often discover that there are some people who haven't signed up and that I need to just stop and talk with a little bit longer so that they will know what they're going to be working on. And I consider that a conference too.

For the next ten to fifteen minutes, individual conferences were held at the student's desk. Students signed up



for individual conferences on a list posted in the classroom. Mrs. Winter usually saw two or three students on the list everyday. If there was a backlog, she sometimes arranged to see students outside of school time. Occasionally if the teacher felt there was a particular need for it, whole class instruction took the place of individual conferences.

Group conferences followed the individual conferences. The children had been divided into five groups with each group having a scheduled conference day. The writing period ended with approximately five minutes of sharing. There was a sign-up list for students who wished to share.

#### Features of the Program

A key feature of the writing program was the fact that students were writing every day on topics of their own choice. Another feature was that children were encouraged to help each other with problems. A chart was posted in the room with the names of students who could help with such things as punctuation, spelling, or topic choice. There was also a chart in the room explaining how to prepare for an individual conference.

Students had a writing binder and were encouraged to keep all of their writing including rough drafts in it. Students kept a list of possible future topics in the front and individual spelling lists drawn from the student's writing were kept at the back.





Another feature of the program was publishing. Students chose the form of publication they wished. Some of their options included producing a play, making a book, posting a story on the wall, mailing a letter or contributing to a newsletter.

Mr. Gantry felt that important features of the program were modelling and positive reinforcement.

Modelling is very important ... we do a lot of writing our own stories on the overhead .... Stressing in all the writing ... what you do well, and not worrying too much about what you do wrong."

#### Perceptions of Conferences in General: Mrs. Winter

Mrs. Winter said that she enjoys conferences because you "get to know the kids really well as people ... it's not just the helping, the teaching part of it ...." Mrs. Winter stated that the kind of feedback she receives from students about conferences is when they're upset about a delay in having an individual conference. She feels that the students "don't really think one way or the other about them, they're just sort of school and this is what we do at school."

Mrs. Winter considers a conference to be a meeting where the student receives some help with his writing. There are different purposes for conferences. Sometimes the student knows specifically what he wants help with, sometimes he just wants to improve his writing, and sometimes he needs help to make a decision about topic choice or about



plans for a piece. Because of this, Mrs. Winter feels that her role in a conference varies. Mrs. Winter stated that she had two goals for every conference. One was to help the student with whatever he requested help with. She determined the second goal during the conference by identifying a major area she felt needed to be worked on.

Mrs. Winter used conferences primarily because they allow for individual instruction.

... The students don't all need instruction in the same thing at the same time or help on the same thing at the same time. And it's much more meaningful to be working on something that you are finding important and worthwhile to you and to have someone help you with whatever difficulties you're having ... right at that time. I think that the students maintain as part of their skill repertoire whatever you teach them in that kind of a setting more than when you go through a sequence of skills, everybody all at the same time without it necessarily being relevant to anybody.

Mrs. Winter explained what usually happens in a conference. She reads the piece and then receives it. She asks questions about certain parts if she needs clarification. If the student has signed up for the conference, she asks what kind of help she can give them and the rest of the conference is determined by what they say. If the student has not signed up for an individual conference, the structure is less defined and she has "to see whatever has happened to an individual in that case." Mrs. Winter expects students to prepare for a revising conference by indicating on their paper the spelling, punctuation and wording they are unsure of. At the end of each conference, Mrs. Winter



tries to make sure that the students know what they are going to be doing next.

For a conference to be good Mrs. Winter feels that the student must trust the teacher so that he is open to criticism about his work. A student will learn something about improving his writing in a good conference. The quality of a conference is also dependent upon the student being properly prepared and really interested in improving his piece. Mrs. Winter is frustrated by conferences where students "... don't see themselves as an integral part of this process .... They want me to do it all for them and I always feel frustrated ... cause I don't feel they're learning anything or getting anywhere."

#### Perceptions of Writing Conferences in General: Mr. Gantry

Mr. Gantry said that he "loved" conferences. "Oh, I love them. I know more about the kids." Mr. Gantry didn't think the students really thought about conferences. "I don't think our students think too much about them like I think this. I think students really think ... well this is the way this teacher does it."

Mr. Gantry views a conference as an opportunity for the student to tell the teacher about what he is doing and what he knows. He prefers that the student, rather than the teacher, identifies the problem to work on in the conference. The teacher and student then solve the problem together, with the teacher acting as a resource person. Mr.



Gantry tries to avoid determining which problem areas to work on in conferences. "I try to stay away from that. I don't know if we're always successful. Sometimes it just ... gets you so much."

Mr. Gantry feels that using conferences are "... the only way ... that you can individualize a writing program." He feels that conferences are a structure or mechanism for letting him see children on an individual basis. He is also aware of other benefits.

... There's a lot of personal contact there .... We're doing a lot of counselling in these conferences.

We have noticed that we have a lot fewer discipline problems with our trouble makers during writing time.

Mr. Gantry attributes this to the fact that the students have a lot more choice and are not being forced to writing on things they don't want to.

Mr. Gantry described what usually happens in a conference. The conference opens with a general question such as "Can you tell me what you're working on?" or "Are you having any problems?" If the student indicates that he is not having any problem, the conference may end there. If the student says that he has a problem, Mr. Gantry tries to get him to be more specific. The conference ends when the student understands how to proceed with his composition.

Mr. Gantry feels that in a good conference, the student actively participates.

I get a really good feeling in a conference ... when both people are participating ... when you





have a student who responds to what you're saying ... and starts asking some questions on his own and starts making some observations about their own writing ... starts making some decisions.

Mr. Gantry feels that in a "poor" conference the "... teacher does all the talking and the student does all the listening." "The ideal thing is for the student to take control."

### Case 3: Charlene

#### Profile

##### Background Information

Charlene, a lively straightforward ten-year-old grade four student has attended Bowden School since grade 2. She is third oldest in a family of five children. Charlene repeated grade two. Her favorite subjects include math, writing, and art.

Charlene's teacher provided further background information. Her general ability falls in the average to low average range. She is a verbal student and expresses her points of view without any hesitation. Charlene has no problems socially and has a lot of friends.

At the beginning of the year, Charlene was neither interested nor comfortable with reading or writing tasks. Mrs. Winter feels she has made a lot of progress. She feels that Charlene is still not a strong writer in terms of sentence structure, organization and elaboration. However, she is strong in terms of confidence which Mrs. Winter



thinks is a necessary prerequisite.

### Perceptions of Writing

Charlene felt that she was an "okay" writer because she wrote good stories. She appeared to be quite proud that other students came to her for topic ideas or to check if their stories made sense. Charlene's teacher had listed her name on a chart as a helper in these areas.

In the first interview Charlene thought that Mrs. Winter would say she was an "okay" writer. In a later interview she changed her view. "She thinks I'm a good writer but not very good...." Charlene identified one student in her room as a good writer because she "... always has the greatest ideas ... and she knows where all the punctuation goes." Form and content were also part of Charlene's explanation of what made a piece of writing good. "When you fix it up nice, write it nice, get your punctuation in, spell it all right and a good topic, like a good thing to write on." Later she mentioned good order and making sense as criteria for a good story.

Charlene identified three students as poor writers because they hardly wrote anything and didn't want to finish anything. Form and content were considered in determining a poor piece of writing. A composition would be poor if it wasn't finished, was all scribbled on, and didn't make sense.

Charlene identified a play that she had written with



two other girls as her best piece of writing. It was long, it was interesting, and everyone thought it the best. In a later interview, Charlene was pleased with a piece and claimed it was her best story. Audience reaction was the determining factor in concluding it was her best story. "... Like when I read my story, some people usually say it's boring right, but everyone thought this was a really good one." Charlene felt the reason more people liked it was because it had more detail, it told more things.

#### Perceptions of Writing Conferences in General

Charlene's overall perceptions of conferences was positive: "...well it helps you write so ... that means it's good."

In the initial interview, Charlene explained that it was "tough" to relate what happened in individual conferences because she hadn't had one for a long time. However, she did outline what she felt happened. Students signed up for a conference which was held at the student's desk. The conference started with the teacher asking the student what he wanted help with. The student told the teacher, and the teacher provided help. Examples of what a student might want help with included topic, punctuation, sentences and spelling. The conference ended when the student no longer needed help. To prepare for an individual conference, the student was to indicate possible spelling, punctuation and wording problems.



Charlene felt that there were three things that made a conference good. "You have a good story, and a good, good person to have a conference with and what you have the conference on." If the story wasn't good, she felt the conference would be boring. It was necessary to have the conference with someone who knows a lot about writing like Mrs. Winter "... cause she's been having writing every year." Charlene felt a conference might be boring if you only talked about punctuation. If a story was long, Charlene felt that spelling, if the story made sense, and paragraphs should be discussed. A conference would be poor if you didn't stay on topic, "... like say you talked about a movie instead of your story."

Charlene is aware of different purposes for conferences. Asked what she thought should happen in a conference, Charlene responded, "It depends .. what your story needs."

### The Nature of Charlene's Writing Conferences

#### Background

The first conference centered on a twelve-line poem Charlene had written to Boy George. She had indicated places where she was unsure of spelling and punctuation. The second conference centered on a story Charlene had written about a boy winning a lottery ticket. Charlene had written about one and a half pages and had indicated places where she wasn't sure of spelling, punctuation or wording.

The conferences took place in the Resource Room with





only the teacher, student and researcher present.

The conferences were examined for the six elements of scaffolding (Graves, 1983), as well as other distinguishing features.

### Predictability

Both conferences started with a predictable opening with Mrs. Winter asking Charlene what she wanted to work on. At the end of each conference Mrs. Winter also checked to make sure Charlene knew how to proceed.

Because the conferences were held outside the classroom at a convenient time for teacher and researcher, the time, place and setting were not predictable.

### Focus

In both conferences, Charlene requested help with spelling, punctuation and checking to see if her writing made sense. These requests became a focus in the two conferences. Charlene had also wanted Mrs. Winter to react to a question she had included at the end of her story. In responding to that request Mrs. Winter focused on brainstorming for ideas.

There were several examples in the conferences where Mrs. Winter's questions helped Charlene to focus her thoughts on decisions she would have to make.

Okay, you're at the point now where you have to decide ... what's going to be the place where it's lost, cause that'll determine how you write next.



Which one do you like?

### Demonstrable Solutions

In the first conference, Mrs. Winter tried to explain to Charlene that phrases and sentences were punctuated in poetry as well as in prose. She also explained how a comma was used to set off the name of the person addressed. Punctuation rules were all explained within the context of Charlene's poem.

In the second conference Mrs. Winter suggested brainstorming for ideas when Charlene indicated that she did not know what she was going to write in the next chapter. "Do you want maybe for us to take a minute and think of all the places where the ticket could be just so you know what to consider?" At another point Mrs. Winter modelled some oral brainstorming. "Was he walking? Was he biking? Was he riding in someone's car?" Mrs. Winter also modelled another strategy. She showed Charlene how she could expand a basic sentence to include more descriptive detail.

Mrs. Winter asked questions which led Charlene to her own solutions. For example, she asked, "Why don't you just read this line here and see if you can tell me what we need to do."

Mrs. Winter provided Charlene with a lot of encouragement when dealing with her spelling errors. For example, "I knew you knew it if you thought about it."



### Role Reversal

Charlene was very animated in both conferences and initiated many comments and questions. At one point in the first conference, she became quite excited when she discovered a solution and interrupted Mrs. Winter. "I know, look it, look it, look it ..."

Charlene asked several questions in the second conference seeking confirmation and clarification.

"Was that a good word for it?"

"... But that, wouldn't that be an action too?"

She constantly interjected making the conference a real dialogue. Some of the comments Charlene initiated involved decisions she had reached about her story. She felt she needed to 1. include more information, "I have to, I have to put how he got home, like on a bike or something," 2. have a third chapter, "I think it's better if he lost it on the way home cause then I can have a third chapter," 3. and add more descriptive detail. "It doesn't tell how old he is either ... I should just, like I should put it right here and describe the character."

Charlene was also using the talk to clarify her thoughts. "Oh, he might have left it in the card cause when he pulled out his, oh no, he hasn't got his card yet."

### Nomenclature

The fact that Charlene sought help with punctuation, spelling and checking to see if her composition made sense



indicates that she was aware of these elements and was placing importance on them at this point in her writing development. Charlene used the terms period, question mark, and exclamation mark when she and Mrs. Winter were checking punctuation. She spoke of doing another draft of her poem and adding another chapter to her story. It is evident that Charlene has learned some terminology to discuss writing. Mrs. Winter tried to extend Charlene's knowledge of punctuation conventions by explaining the concept and giving Charlene the label for using commas for words in a series. Mrs. Winter also spoke of ideas and although she did not use the term brainstorming suggested using the strategy. The terminology Mrs. Winter and Charlene used referred to both the form and content of writing.

#### Humor or Playfulness

Playful moments in the conferences include the part where Charlene broke her pencil lead and her reaction to Mrs. Winter's response to a question. Mrs. Winter also reacted in a playful manner to several of Charlene's ideas. When Charlene suggested that her character could lose his ticket in West Edmonton mall, Mrs. Winter laughed and stated, "He'll never find it!"

#### Other Features

What most characterized Charlene's conferences was the warmth, the spontaneity and the active role Charlene took in her own learning. Both Mrs. Winter and Charlene appeared to





enjoy the conferences.

Charlene appeared to be very confident and comfortable initiating questions and comments. She was actively involved in all parts of the conferences.

Mrs. Winter structured the conferences and asked questions to ensure Charlene retained ownership of her writing. Charlene's binder always remained in front of her. Although Mrs. Winter did write in a few correct spellings, it was Charlene who added punctuation and wrote the brainstorming list. Mrs. Winter let Charlene decide the focus of the conferences by asking her what she wanted to work on. She accepted decisions Charlene made, such as her decision to do another draft and to add another chapter.

More than anything else however Charlene showed her ownership by the number of questions and comments she initiated. One particular incident epitomized not only Charlene's ownership of her writing, but also her expectations of ownership. Mrs. Winter pointed out a logical place where Charlene could write out her brainstorming list. Charlene flipped over several pages in her binder and stated, "I'll do it right here."

There was evidence of all six elements in Charlene's conferences as well as other distinguishing features.

#### Perceptions of Specific Writing Conferences:

##### Charlene and Mrs. Winter

Mrs. Winter and Charlene had similar perceptions of the



goals for the conferences. Charlene wanted help in completing her pieces. Mrs. Winter wanted to help Charlene with whatever she requested. Mrs. Winter did not have another goal for the first conference. "There was nothing else that I could see that we should do with the thing." She felt that teaching Charlene what kind of phrasing could go on each line would be too technical for her at that time. During the second conference, Mrs. Winter decided to show Charlene the brainstorming strategy. This goal she felt followed logically from Charlene's request for an answer to the question in her story. Mrs. Winter interpreted this as a request for help with ideas and was surprised. "Usually if she, if she has an idea she goes with it and there's no stopping her once she gets started. So this is kind of a different pattern."

Charlene thought both conferences were good. The first was a "good conference because ... we got ... this poem done and nobody was talking." She felt that Mrs. Winter "... thought it was okay." This opinion was based on the fact that Mrs. Winter "... didn't say ... you've got a lot of words like wrong or things like that." Completing her story and the fact that it was quiet were also criteria for saying that the second conference was good. "It was good because I got my story done and my first chapter and I finally got my conference and um I'm ready to go on with my second chapter ... because it was quiet."

Based on these two conferences, Charlene's criteria for a



good conference include completing a written piece, quiet, and lack of negative criticism.

Mrs. Winter also had positive feelings about the conferences although her reasons were somewhat different than Charlene's. Mrs. Winter changed her mind about the first conference. Her initial reaction was not overly enthusiastic. She felt that Charlene had not "learned a whole lot about writing." However the next day she explained that she had thought about it and had changed her mind. She explained that Charlene was still very much at a technical stage and "... she really hasn't realized that ideas sometimes need to be reorganized or abandoned or rephrased or whatever." In retrospect she felt that it made sense that Charlene was at this stage considering that at the beginning of the year, she wasn't writing anything. In the end she thought that "... it was a worthwhile step for her in learning a little more about writing." Perhaps Mrs. Winter's initial reaction to Charlene's first conference was influenced by her feelings regarding editing conferences. An editing conference is "... not as much fun, it's not as interesting to me." Mrs. Winter was also happy that Charlene had shared something personal with her.

...it's a good sign in that she's not one that opens up and takes risks right away so I feel we've, we must have reached a point where she feels she can trust me and that's positive.

Mrs. Winter felt that Charlene was very interested in improving her poem. She based her opinion on body language.



Charlene

watches very closely whatever she's interested in and if she's not interested she'll up and do something else in the middle of anything. She's fairly flighty so if she's not keen she won't be with you for very long.

Mrs. Winter felt that they had "accomplished quite a bit" in the second conference.

... the conferences have been showing that ... she's learning about the process of writing as well as enjoying it and creating interesting stories.

She felt that Charlene had been very involved in the second conference and probably learned a fair amount about punctuation.

Both Mrs. Winter and Charlene perceived the predictable opening structure as an opportunity for Charlene to state what she wanted to work on in the conference. Their perceptions were also similar in regard to a section where Mrs. Winter received information.

Mrs. Winter: I'm doing a process I call receiving which is telling her back what I have read so that she can let me know if I am interpreting her correctly.

Charlene: She was making sure that's what I wanted to say.

It is evident that Charlene was familiar with the rationale behind certain structures and procedures. Mrs. Winter was aware that Charlene responded to predictable patterns in conferences.

She's a good kid in a conference, she's an annoying kid some other times because she just leaps up and does things but in a conference like that she just leaps up and spells freezer and that's good (laughs). Saves me lots of explanation. She





knows what's supposed to happen then and she just goes ahead and I like that, working with her in a conference.

Charlene and Mrs. Winter had similar understandings of some of the focus questions. Mrs. Winter asked Charlene about her plans for her poem.

Charlene: She wanted to know if I was going to finish it or if I was going to do my draft two.

Mrs. Winter: I want to know that she knows what she's going to do after this draft.

Charlene also understood what Mrs. Winter was referring to when she asked her about plans beyond the second draft. Mrs. Winter explained to the researcher several of the options Charlene would have such as sharing, making a book, posting it on the wall, mailing it. Charlene was aware of several options. Mrs. Winter wanted to know if she was going to say the poem or "... put it in one of those little books or something like that."

The stimulated recall interviews revealed that Mrs. Winter often faced some difficult decisions before teaching Charlene some writing convention and strategies. Charlene's stage of development was usually considered when making a decision about what to teach her. Charlene was generally unaware of her teacher's dilemmas.

In the first conference Mrs. Winter debated how and what to teach regarding punctuation in poetry.

I was kind of two minds doing this because there is such a variety of ways of doing poetry ... that I thought, 'Hmm, how should I do this?' I think we should just punctuate and not bother telling them anything at this point.



Charlene inadvertently saved her teacher one decision.

Uh, in a poem that would be perfectly acceptable. In prose it wouldn't be so I was still debating now how are we going to do this, uh, fortunately she jumped in and said, I know, I know, I know (laughs) and got us going.

In the same poem, Mrs. Winter explained to Charlene that a comma was used to separate an introductory clause and to separate the person addressed from the rest of the sentence. Mrs. Winter commented on the difficulty in explaining such matters.

... with kids at this level where you haven't learned a name for these clauses and stuff it's kind of hard to explain where to put these stupid things. I hope it will sort of come intuitively after awhile without a name for it.

Mrs. Winter said that she wasn't interested in Charlene learning a name for it but she felt the dilemma.

... I often wonder does it, which way works better -- learning the actual name for this stuff so you can explain what you're doing and have a rule about how to use the comma or just having situations like this come up so that you eventually just sort of know that's where it's going to go ... It's complicated business learning to write.

Charlene is oblivious to her teacher's concerns and commented on the section: "We're finishing my story and ... she was saying pause and then she went, then finished the sentence."

Charlene thought "pause" meant that you should have a period or something. She said that she had put in a comma. It is difficult to determine just how much Charlene understood of her teacher's explanation.

At another point in the conference Mrs. Winter debated



whether to explain that sometimes an exclamation mark can be used instead of a question mark.

I thought ... she's still too fuzzy on punctuation for us to try to get off into these slight variations. We better start with the simple rules, um get her question marks down first before we worry about sort of abandoning that and branching off.

Charlene understood that there had been sort of a problem in that part.

... we had trouble with our, our punctuation in one of the things because I said like what he was saying like excited and Mrs. Winter said it was uh a question ... It was excited and as a question. She said, 'Well let's just put it as a question.'

At another point in the conference Charlene chose an idea from the brainstorming list because she felt she could then have another chapter. Mrs. Winter didn't think her reason for eliminating the other ideas was a good one. However she did not pursue the issue since Charlene

"... seemed to have a pretty good idea of where she was going with that one and she made that decision. That's fine!"

There were several incidents in the conference where it was evident that Charlene was maintaining ownership of her writing. Some of these were perceived as such by Mrs. Winter and Charlene. Commenting on why Mrs. Winter suggested they both think of ideas and list them, Charlene stated, "... like it's my story, and um like I might not want none of her things but I might want some of mine ... she wanted to help me get some ideas."

Mrs. Winter put it this way:

I don't want these to be all my ideas and at



the same time if ... she wasn't stuck she wouldn't be asking me so I'll be quite happy to throw some in too but I still want her to know that this is part of the process and she should be thinking of ideas too.

Two comments Charlene initiated in the second conference provided Mrs. Winter with some insight into her writing development. Charlene stated that she would need to include information about how her character got home.

... at first I wasn't sure what she meant ... till I figured out that she realized that if she was going to continue she needed more, more preceding information. So at first I was puzzled but then I thought, 'Oh well this is great. She's putting the two things together and realizing a little bit about how stories work that I didn't know she knew how to work with.'

Charlene commented that she hadn't told how old her character was, and she thought she should include that and a description of the character. Mrs. Winter felt these comments revealed some positive information about Charlene's writing development.

... from working on spelling, punctuation and the words not sounding right she's gone quite a bit farther just within this conference showing me she's learned a lot more about what you need to do to work on a story in terms of ideas and the development of them, so, now ... I'm feeling even more positive than I did yesterday ... Now I think we even got farther than I realized.

Mrs. Winter traced Charlene's ideas about describing the character to a class presentation by author Jan Hudson. Although Charlene did not refer to the Jan Hudson talks, she is keenly aware of her audience when she considers adding description: "... because then ... when people who read it then they ... know who's in it and um how the character is





and what he looks like and all that."

### Summary

Charlene and Mrs. Winter had positive feelings about the conferences although their reasons for these feelings were different. They had similar perceptions of some of the predictable structures. Their understandings of some of the focus questions were also similar. They both felt Charlene was the owner of her writing and as such made decisions concerning it. Charlene was unaware of Mrs. Winter's silent deliberations regarding what and how to teach. She was also unaware that Mrs. Winter had gained considerable insight into her writing development. On the whole it would appear that Charlene and Mrs. Winter had similar perceptions of most aspects of the conferences.

### Case 4: Edgar

#### Profile

##### Background Information

Edgar, a ten-year-old grade four student, has attended Bowden School since grade two. He has a younger sister in grade three. This is the third year Edgar has had Mrs. Winter for a teacher, having been in her grade two and grade four class. Edgar is repeating grade four. Edgar thinks school is "a bit fun."

Mrs. Winter feels that Edgar is a below average student. This year he has a much better attitude toward school



and is experiencing much more success and confidence.

Mrs. Winter thinks that some of Edgar's writing skills are average and that he has good ideas. Spelling is a particular problem but "... even that he's more conscious of!" Mrs. Winter is pleased with Edgar's improvement over the year.

... I've been pleased with the way he's been doing this year under this program. He's been getting the individual encouragement and help and being accepted where he's at and it seems to be working really well for him."

### Perceptions of Writing

Edgar was asked what he thought of himself as a writer. He replied that he didn't know. He didn't like writing that much and thought it was "weird." When asked what was weird about writing, Edgar replied,

Well, you have to do it over again. You do one and then you have to do it over again. Or you have to have spelling mistakes. So everybody's not perfect so I think myself not perfect.

Edgar was asked if he always wrote several drafts of a composition. He replied that that was what Mrs. Winter and Mr. Gantry wished.

But some people don't listen like me ... Sometimes I write it and then just leave it for awhile and then get back to it and some people in the class does that too.

Edgar had discovered another way to ensure further revision is unnecessary.

Edgar: ... Some people throw their writing out. Sometimes I do ...



Researcher: How come?

Edgar: I don't know, it just gets messed up with your other work. Other papers which have scribbles on them.

Edgar did not know what Mrs. Winter thought of him as a writer but Mr. Gantry, the co-teacher, thought he was an excellent writer. Edgar thought this was because he used big words, good punctuation and checked his spelling in the dictionary. Edgar thought that in order to become a better writer he had to "do more spelling" and "know his punctuation more." It is interesting that Edgar felt he needed to improve in areas which he had identified as reasons for Mr. Gantry thinking he was an excellent writer.

Edgar identified two students in his room as good writers. They knew their spelling, punctuation and paragraphs. Although Edgar's criteria for a good writer focused on skills he was more content and audience oriented in his ideas of what made a piece of writing good. "If you ... put more detail and more big words that makes it interesting." Edgar went on to include spelling and staying on topic as criteria for making a story good.

### Perceptions of Writing Conferences in General

Edgar thinks conferences are "okay" "... cause you need help ... If you don't get help you can't be a good writer." Edgar did not have conferences last year and thinks it's better to have them "... because last year we couldn't get that much help. This year you get lots of help."



Students get help with spelling, punctuation and how your story should go (staying on topic). Edgar did not like having to wait for a conference. "When you want them, they're with somebody else ... you have to wait and get on with your writing."

Edgar explained that students signed up for individual conferences which were held at the student's desk or somewhere in the hall. Mrs. Winter talked to students one at a time, crossed their names off the list and then moved on to the next person. Edgar said that he signed up for individual conferences "... but most of the time I can do it on my own." Edgar was aware of opening and closing structures. Mrs. Winter began a conference by asking the student what he wanted help with.

Well she says, 'What do you want help with?' and I say, 'My story.' And then she says, 'What kind of thing do you want help with, punctuation, spelling, your story, and your pick out one.' Spelling you can pick as much as you want. And then she helps you and you do draft two and draft three.

Mrs. Winter ends a conference by asking if the student is finished and if everything is okay.

Edgar identified two criteria for determining the quality of a conference. These criteria were the student's story and how the student talked about it. If the story was boring, the student wouldn't want to talk about it and would talk in a low voice or "not pay attention." "... Sometimes you'll just look around and ... they don't pay attention to the teacher." Unlike a student, the teacher is apparently not affected by the interest level of a story. "The teacher





will talk about anything."

## The Nature of Edgar's Conferences

### Background

For the first conference, Edgar was working on a play entitled, "Canada MA." It was a spoof on a television newscast and a play on words. For example when one character shoots the film another reacts as if shot by a bullet.

The second conference was about a different play which Edgar had started several months before. He had written about half a page of this play entitled, "Trip Around the World." Edgar explained to the researcher that he could not find his play from the first conference. Following the second conference, Edgar told the researcher that he did not plan to continue working on "Trip Around the World." He appeared to have lost all interest in it although he said that he might go back to it.

The conferences took place in the Resource Room with only the teacher, student and researcher present.

The conferences were examined for evidence of the six elements of scaffolding (Graves, 1983) as well as other distinguishing features.

### Predictability

The normal conference time, place and setting were altered to accommodate the researcher and teacher. However there was evidence of other predictable structures in the



conference. Both conferences began with Mrs. Winter's predictable question, "All right, (Edgar), what would you like us to work on today?" The conferences also ended with a predictable structure. Mrs. Winter checked with Edgar to see if he was ready to proceed on his own.

### Focus

In each conference after Edgar vaguely indicated what he wanted to work on, Mrs. Winter asked a question to help him focus on something more specific. In each case he wanted help with ideas to proceed with his story. There were several examples in each conference where Mrs. Winter helped Edgar to focus on what he might write next. Mrs. Winter provided Edgar with several possible alternatives but always left the decision to him.

... when he comes in and has this on his head, what does he do next? Does he sit someplace? Does he stand right there and say, 'Hi, I'm a sub?' Does he go get out the papers to read the news? What is his next action?

Mrs. Winter also helped Edgar to focus on what he had written when she received his piece after reading it. In addition to helping Edgar with ideas in the first conference, Mrs. Winter also focused on the use of brackets to indicate non-speaking parts in play form.

In the second conference once it was evident that Edgar did indeed have some ideas about what he could write, Mrs. Winter changed the focus of the conference. The discussion then centered around changing his play into story form.



### Demonstrable Solutions

In the first conference, Mrs. Winter reviewed the use of brackets when writing in play form. She then asked Edgar to apply the concept in his piece of writing.

This has to be in brackets then cause he's not saying this but he would need to know it when he's getting ready for the play and planning his action. So in brackets, how are you going to say that part?

Mrs. Winter used oral brainstorming in each conference to help Edgar add detail and/or consider what he might write next.

Mrs. Winter: He's packed his bags, he's left.  
Where is he now in this process? Is  
he just outside his door or is he ...

Edgar: Calgary.

Mrs. Winter: He's in Calgary, at the bus station  
at the airport, at the ...

Edgar: Airport.

In the second conference Mrs. Winter suggested that story form would be more appropriate than play form for that particular piece of writing. Edgar was ready to accept the suggestion without question but Mrs. Winter went on to explain the reasons for her suggestion. She then asked questions so that Edgar could verbalize what he would need to add in order to change a section from play form to story form.

Near the end of the conference Mrs. Winter pointed to a part in Edgar's paper which could be used as written and to



others where he would need to use more detail. Edgar however was not paying attention during this part of the conference, and did not even look at his paper.

### Role Reversal

There were very few incidents in the conferences where Edgar initiated comments. The few incidents he did initiate were generally to inform Mrs. Winter of some humorous aspect he had either written or planned to include in his story. Edgar did not ask any questions in the conferences. In the latter part of the second conference, Edgar's responses to questions were restricted to one or two word replies.

### Nomenclature

There were examples in each conference where Mrs. Winter used terminology specific to writing. She talked about play form and story form, character actions and scenery changes. When Edgar said that he wanted help with words she checked to see if he meant ideas. She reviewed the use of brackets and explained how he would need to add more detail.

### Humor or Playfulness

Some humor or playfulness was evident in each conference. Edgar had either written or planned to write parts which he thought were funny. In the first conference, Mrs. Winter laughed when she discovered that the sub in Edgar's





play was going to be a submarine rather than a substitute. She also responded to Edgar's other play on words, "sock her" for "soccer." The way Edgar was grinning during these sessions suggests he expected some reaction.

Edgar seemed to enjoy the sound of Boo-Boo Eddie, one of his character's names. He repeated it twice and initiated a comment about its origin.

### Other Features

There was a great difference in Edgar's attitude in the two conferences. In the first conference, he appeared to be listening very carefully and took an active part in the dialogue. Edgar appeared to lose all interest about a third of the way through the second conference. He frequently looked away from Mrs. Winter and did not even look at his paper when she was pointing out things on it. He rubbed his eyes and squinted a few times. Answers to Mrs. Winter's questions were often short one or two word responses.

Also very noticeable in the conferences were the teacher's efforts to make Edgar responsible for his own writing. His binder was directly in front of him and it was he who added things to his paper. He gave the conference its initial direction by telling Mrs. Winter what he wanted to work on. When his answers were at first vague she asked him to be more specific. Although Mrs. Winter suggested some ideas for continuing with his play, it was Edgar who made the decisions which she accepted. Edgar seemed to be quite



willing to accept without explanation Mrs. Winter's suggestion that he change to story form. Mrs. Winter explained her reasons to him anyway.

The researcher felt that Mrs. Winter was determined to have Edgar assume responsibility for his own writing although at times he appeared somewhat indifferent to accepting it.

There was evidence of all of the six elements in Edgar's conferences. There were, in addition, other distinguishing features.

#### Perceptions of Specific Conferences: Edgar and Mrs. Winter

Edgar and Mrs. Winter's feelings about the conferences were somewhat different. Edgar thought the first conference was "...good ... because it helped me." He felt he had received help with ideas and with brackets. He thought that Mrs. Winter probably thought it was good too because "...she helped somebody ... improve their writing."

Mrs. Winter stated that the first conference turned out better than she had expected since prior to the conference, Edgar hadn't even decided which piece he would talk about. She felt that although Edgar asked for help with ideas he already had vague ideas about what would happen next in his play.

Edgar felt that the second conference was "... bad because that story was boring. I didn't like it that much." He thought that maybe Mrs. Winter found the conference "a



bit boring" too. Asked what made him think that, Edgar replied that it was the way she talked. He felt she spoke differently in this conference.

...like she says 'Okay' (voice low and monotone) instead of 'Okay' (voice higher and cheerful) like it was like different okays ... like different way of talking, like lower.

Mrs. Winter was aware of Edgar's disinterest during the second conference.

I didn't think he was as interested in this conference. He looked around more. And it was a day when I wasn't feeling particularly up either so I wondered is it a response to me or is he, or is this not really a great day for him. I, cause, I did notice he was looking around a bit more.

When viewing the videotape, Mrs. Winter wondered how she had been so aware of Edgar's actions, because when he was looking away, she had been looking at his paper and not at him. Mrs. Winter also felt that her feelings had not been visible.

... I know he wasn't really with me and I thought, 'Is this my down day?' I think it's my down day cause I know I wasn't feeling good. But that doesn't come across on the tape anyway, but his response does.

It would appear that Edgar is very sensitive to subtle changes in his teacher, even when those are not outwardly apparent to her.

Mrs. Winter had mixed feelings about the conferences because of Edgar's indifference.

I thought it had real possibilities as far as a learning experience for Edgar in that um just to learn that one form of writing uh can be more appropriate in one circumstance than another is a very important thing to learn. But I don't know if he will retain it.



Mrs. Winter had two major goals for each conference. One was to assist Edgar with whatever he said he wanted help with, which in both conferences was ideas. The second goals were determined during the conferences. In the first conference, Mrs. Winter wanted to

... give him some instruction on writing in play form, recording the spoken parts and the action parts so they'd be clear to someone else who was dramatizing the thing.

In the second conference she wanted "... to point out to him that he needed to change his form of writing and that would help his piece a lot." Mrs. Winter's goals for the conferences could also be placed in a broader more general framework. She stated that she wanted to help Edgar

... write the play that he would enjoy writing at the same time to help him learn about writing but it's through his purposes for writing that he's learning.

Edgar felt that one reason for having both conferences was for his teacher to "... see how I'm doing in my writing." Another reason for the first conference was for her to check on punctuation. "... And how my punctuation's going along cause this year I wasn't too good at punctuation and I started getting at it, doing better."

It is interesting that Edgar included checking on punctuation as a reason for the conference. Neither he nor Mrs. Winter mentioned it in the conference. Also interesting is the fact that Edgar did not include receiving help as a reason for having the conference. He had told the researcher in the general interview that Mrs. Winter started





conferences by asking students what they wanted help with.

Mrs. Winter and Edgar had similar perceptions of what the predictable structures in conferences entailed. Referring to the opening question Edgar states: "She was asking me what to work on today ... because she wanted to help me with something." Mrs. Winter revealed her desire for the child to retain ownership of his story when she asked Edgar to be more precise.

... I can't write his story for him. I don't want to tell him everything that's wrong with it. I want him to narrow it down to something so be a little more precise.

In one section of the videotape Edgar recognized that Mrs. Winter was receiving his story. However he didn't understand why she received it. Mrs. Winter explained her use of the technique. "I'm telling him what I read so that he can confirm that I am understanding what he has written so far, and understanding it correctly."

In both conferences, there were examples where Mrs. Winter asked Edgar questions to focus on some details he could include. Edgar thought she just wanted to know the answer to her question "... cause it wasn't in my story." Mrs. Winter on the other hand wanted Edgar to form a picture of the setting in his mind and eventually in the reader's mind, if he chose to include the details.

... until you kind of define some of those in your mind, even if you don't ever write them, you usually are lacking some feeling in your story for the characters.

Her statement reflects a knowledge of the writing process.



In the second conference, Mrs. Winter focused on changing Edgar's piece from play form to story form. "I'm explaining to him that he has chosen an inappropriate form for the story that he's writing."

Watching the videotape of this section Mrs. Winter wondered if Edgar would actually do anything with the piece. Edgar's perceptions of this section are revealing. He felt Mrs. Winter had suggested his "number one decision" would be to write his play in story form because play form was harder. Asked why, Edgar replied, "... I don't know why, um she just ... suggested it. And I went along with her cause she's the teacher." Edgar seemed to be somewhat indifferent to retaining ownership at this point. However with further questioning Edgar did say that the number of scenery changes would be a problem in play form. And this is what Mrs. Winter had wanted him to realize. Later in the stimulated recall interview Edgar told the researcher of his plan to leave the play and work on another piece. His comment implied ownership, an expectation that he would be allowed to make that decision.

Edgar appeared to understand the solutions Mrs. Winter was suggesting in both conferences. In the first conference he commented that Mrs. Winter was "... telling me how to put Spencer in brackets ..." Brackets were needed because "... the narrator is not going to say this like ... the guy in the back can read its own script and come in as a sub."

Mrs. Winter explained that she was reviewing that both



actions and spoken words needed to be indicated in play form. Mrs. Winter's questioning in the second conference led Edgar to verbalize how he would change a section to story form. Edgar and Mrs. Winter held similar perceptions of that particular section.

Edgar thought parts of each of his plays were funny. He liked the play on words for sub, soccer and boo-boo. He figured Mrs. Winter thought they were funny too because "... she sort of laughed." Mrs. Winter was very much aware that Edgar thought those parts were humorous.

It doesn't thrill me too much but this is his story and I'll back off unless it's really gross.  
(laughs)

His humor isn't my humor, but I expect he'll have an audience for it. (laughs)

### Summary

Edgar and Mrs. Winter's feelings about the conferences were somewhat different. In the second conference, however, each was aware of the other's mood. Their perceptions of the goals or reasons for the conferences were different. They had similar perceptions of some of the predictable structures. Their perceptions of what was behind some of the focus points differed. Mrs. Winter felt some of her questions and comments were designed to have Edgar retain ownership of his story. One of Edgar's comments suggested an indifference to ownership although a later statement implied being allowed to make decisions concerning his writ-



ing. Edgar understood his teacher's explanation about using brackets and changing a sentence from play form to story form. Both Mrs. Winter and Edgar were aware of playful moments in the conferences. Mrs. Winter was not particularly enamored with Edgar's sense of humor but laughed anyway at those parts he considered humorous.

Some of Edgar and Mrs. Winter's perceptions were similar, others quite different. There was no discernable pattern.

### Case 5: Tina

#### Profile

##### Background Information

Tina, a vibrant nine-year-old grade four student has attended Bowden School since grade one. Tina has one sister in kindergarten. Her favorite subjects in school are writing and math. Tina said that she sometimes writes "poems and stuff" at home. She is an avid reader.

Mr. Gantry feels that Tina is a mature student who has above average ability, good work habits and a good self-image. He described her writing ability as "very good, perhaps excellent ... above grade level." He feels that she is fairly confident about what she's doing, is very conscious of audience, uses good words, verbalizes what she wants help with and controls the writing.





### Perceptions of Writing

Tina thinks that she is a "good" writer. One reason is that Mrs. Winter had told her that her Pippi story sounded just like the author's. Tina referred to this compliment several times during the interviews. Tina felt that Mr. Gantry also thought she was a good writer because of her vocabulary and ideas. Tina couldn't think of an area in which she needed to improve. "I think I'm doing just fine."

Tina identified a student in her room as a good writer because she was good at spelling, her stories were "scientific" and one story had been chosen for a television program. Tina's criteria for a good piece of writing include good ideas, good words, exciting spelling, punctuation and neatness. Tina's criteria include both form and content.

Tina thought her Pippi story was one of her best pieces. It was one of the longest stories she had ever written and "it sounded just like the author's."

Tina stated that she liked to write. The following quotation illustrates her awareness of her writing process and her aversion to revision:

... I don't really like putting things into good form ... it takes a lot of effort and sometimes a long time, if it's a long book. But ... it's fun if ... you've got everything in control. I'd rather just put it in good form the first time I did it.

### Perceptions of Writing Conferences in General

Tina had positive feelings about conferences. She



liked having somebody to talk to about a writing problem. Tina thought that an individual conference was "... where you have a problem or you want to rewrite it." The teacher asks you questions and helps you. Conferences are held "... to help you improve and things and like if you have a problem."

Tina explained that students signed up for individual conferences which are held at the student's desk. Mr. Gantry usually started the conference by asking the student if he was having a problem. Mr. Gantry's questions were "funny" and "tricky so you can improve more." At the end of the conference, Mr. Gantry checked to see if there were any other problems. Tina mentioned several times that she did not have many individual conferences because she didn't need them.

For a conference to be good, Tina felt that the student really had to know what his problem was and had to be able to work it out. Both the student and teacher had responsibilities in a conference. The student "... cooperates ... takes ideas and ... works them out." The teacher, she felt, should listen and not "... make remarks that are weird, that won't help at all." Tina's example of a weird remark was the teacher "going off the subject." Tina didn't like conferences if they took too long and the teacher repeated "...something that you've already sort of told her over and over again." A conference would be poor "... if you really don't know what your problem is and you're just wasting time



doing nothing."

## The Nature of Tina's Conferences

### Background

For both conferences, Tina was working on a play called "Pippi's House." Tina had previously written a two-chapter story about Pippi Longstocking and was now adapting the first chapter of her story into a play. For the first conference she had completed almost a page. At the time of the second conference she had added only three more sentences. Tina reported to Mr. Gantry that she had recently had a conference with Mrs. Winter. The videotaped conferences took place in the Resource Room with only the teacher, student and researcher present.

The conferences were examined for evidence of the six elements of scaffolding identified by Graves.

### Predictability

It was evident Tina found the beginning part of a conference predictable. She immediately started to talk about her writing in the second conference without an introductory question from the teacher. Another predictable structure evident in both conferences was the teacher's attempt to find out what Tina's future plans were.

The conference time, place and setting were altered to accommodate the researcher and teacher.



## Focus

In the first conference Mr. Gantry focused on Tina's decision to change her story into a play format. By asking her why she made the decision, Mr. Gantry was helping her to focus on her own writing process. Mr. Gantry tried to get Tina to verbalize differences between the two forms. He read parts of the play and the story. He asked her how a story was different from a play and what the role of a narrator was in a play.

The other major focus of the first conference was the teacher's praise for two particular aspects of Tina's writing. Mr. Gantry was pleased that Tina had adapted her script to suit a particular person she had in mind for the part.

That's actually really interesting because I think that Hollywood ... writers do that a lot too, they write for Paul Newman who's got blue eyes ... that's very professional.

... And this part where you've really tried to show a picture. The eyes popped out of the head and you compared that to Spencer, cause that's what he can do ... that's a really good idea.

Mr. Gantry also praised Tina for editing out information as she transformed her story into a play:

... going back and changing the language like you've done here and leaving parts out that's showing me that you're really growing as a writer ... when a student starts doing that you can sort of say, "Gee, that person is really starting to get the idea of what writing is really all about. It's taking stuff out and putting stuff in."

In addition to the praise Mr. Gantry also tried to focus Tina on her own writing process. He asked her why she





had left out information that was in her story and asked her what she meant when she changed a phrase.

Other focus points in the first conference included Mr. Gantry's inquiries about which piece of writing Tina was happier with, her future plans for the play and the role of another student in writing the play.

The main focus of the second conference was Mr. Gantry's praise for Tina's composition and the progress in writing she had made since the beginning of the year.

... You're using characters well, and you're developing them and ... you've got people in mind. I think that's really a good thing ... I see you started to use quotation marks there and I think that's something that's really important for a mature writer ... you're using good words, you've got a good story. You've got a story line, it sounds like a story, and ... you're thinking about how it all goes together and you're thinking ahead and those are all ... good things.

You know your spelling has improved over the year and that's really important and ... your handwriting has come along really well.

In asking Tina to identify an area she wished to improve in next, Mr. Gantry tried to have Tina focus on her own writing process and assume some responsibility for her own learning.

### Demonstrable Solutions

There was no evidence of this element in the conferences.

### Role Reversal

Tina asked a clarifying question in the first confer-



ence. She also initiated a comment explaining how a performance of her play might help her to improve it. Tina began the second conference without waiting for an opening question.

### Nomenclature

It is evident that Tina is able to understand and use some writing terminology. She used the words character and narrator to talk about her play. She felt she wanted to improve in spelling and paragraphs. Mr. Gantry spoke about developing characters, good words, story line, trying to show a picture, changing the language and using quotation marks. The terminology used referred to both the form and content of writing.

### Humor or Playfulness

There was some evidence of humor and playfulness in each conference. In the first conference, Mr. Gantry playfully exaggerated and dramatized the part in Tina's play where one of her character's "eyes almost fell out." Tina laughed at his antics.

In the second conference Tina giggled over Mr. Gantry's reference to a spelling error she had made earlier in the year. Mr. Gantry ended the conference on a playful note, by jokingly suggesting that Tina get back to her writing and "... stop all this nonsense fooling around."



### Other Features

The atmosphere in each conference was very light and friendly. It was evident that Mr. Gantry had established an excellent rapport with Tina. She was actively involved in the conferences and paid close attention to what was being said, frequently nodding and smiling.

Mr. Gantry appeared to be interested in Tina's learning about her own writing process. He asked her several questions about the reasons for decisions she made in her writing.

The most salient feature of the conferences was the amount of praise and positive reinforcement. It was the main focus in both conferences. Mr. Gantry praised Tina for editing out information, adapting a script to fit a particular person, developing characters, using quotation marks, using good words, having a good story line, improved spelling and handwriting and for thinking ahead.

There was evidence of five of the six elements: predictability, focus, role reversal, nomenclature and humor. There was no evidence of demonstrable solutions. Other distinguishing features of the conferences included the focus on Tina's writing process and the great amount of praise and positive reinforcement.

### Perceptions of Specific Writing Conferences: Tina and Mr. Gantry

Both Mr. Gantry and Tina had positive feelings about the conferences. Tina enjoyed the positive reinforcement in



the first conference. "It was fun to learn that I was doing the right things." She felt that the conference had helped her improve her writing because she now had a model for changes she made in her script. "... I might think after if we didn't have this conference ... (and) I didn't know about Hollywood writers. I would go, 'Oh, I better ... keep it as he turned white.' "

Mr. Gantry felt "really good" about the first conference. "I thought the conference went well because I got a little bit more insight into what (Tina) was doing ...." He was pleased that Tina was able to verbalize what she was trying to do and that she was starting to use revision.

Mr. Gantry also thought that the second conference was successful. He was especially pleased that Tina had initiated the second conference. "I just thought, 'Gee, isn't that super ... isn't that exactly what ... we would like to happen with every conference. The student just knows exactly what the role is and slips right into ...' " The conference was "really good" because it gave him a chance to point out five things that Tina was doing well. Mr. Gantry felt that both conferences were too long. Tina did not find the second conference long, in fact, it was "sort of short." "... It was sort of pretty awkward that when I'd hardly even wrote any more ... and that he felt he had kept me too long."

Mr. Gantry's goals for the conferences were to discover what Tina was doing and then to provide positive reinforce-





ment for those things that she was doing well.

... it's more or less to point out to her what she's doing well, so finding areas where she's growing and improving, point them out to her and really emphasize (them) to her ... so that she continues to do that.

Mr. Gantry had decided that he would not focus on mechanics because Tina seemed to be developing these skills on her own. Only if Tina indicated that she needed help would he "... get involved with a skill in her writing right now."

Tina thought that there were three reasons for the conferences. One was to help her improve, the second to let Mr. Gantry know what she was doing and the third, to help the researcher.

The main focus of the first conference was Mr. Gantry's praise for two aspects of Tina's writing. He praised Tina for changing the language and leaving out parts as she rewrote the story into play form. Mr. Gantry felt that he was giving her encouragement and positive reinforcement by showing her that her writing was improving and developing. He explained that when grade four students started to edit out information they've "... made a big step. And if you can point that out to them, right when they're doing it then they're not going to be so abashed about doing it later on ..." Mr. Gantry thought that Tina really felt good about the praise. "She's nodding and she's eating this all up. She's smiling, and you know I think she's really feeling good about ... what's being said here."

Tina understood what Mr. Gantry's praise was referring



to. She explained to the researcher that some children had problems editing out material but she didn't. She felt "sort of proud" about Mr. Gantry's comments. She understood why he had told her these things. "Well, so ... I'll remember it and if I start another play like, that would be a good idea."

Mr. Gantry was also impressed that Tina had adapted a line in her play to suit a particular person. This was evidence, he thought, that she was "maturing as a writer." He felt that he was giving Tina positive reinforcement by pointing out that Hollywood writers also write for particular actors. At this point in the stimulated recall interview Mr. Gantry commented on the approach he and Mrs. Winter were using.

It ... really concentrates on showing the student a good model, preferably their own. So when they do something right, let's show it to them ... you can say, "hey, there's ... something that good writers can do and you're doing it too..." Don't tell the students what they can't do, tell them what they can do and work from there ... the assumption is that they will then ... use that repetitiously.

Mr. Gantry's praise and his reference to Hollywood writers appear to have had their intended effect. Tina commented, "What was going through my mind was, 'Well, I better do that some more cause if it's going to make my story better and stuff then that's an improvement.' "

In the first conference, Mr. Gantry also focused on Tina's decision to write her story in play form. He was trying to learn more about Tina's writing process, that is,



"... what was involved in that decision." Tina understood what was behind Mr. Gantry's question. "... My story was going really good and ... he was just wondering why I stopped." Mr. Gantry asked Tina why she had not included everything in her play that was in her story. He wanted Tina to focus on her writing process. "I want her to ... verbalize why she's making those decisions about her writing, because then it brings it home to her that she is making those decisions and that they are ... fairly important."

Mr. Gantry also focused on Tina's writing process when he asked her to explain why she had changed a phrase. "She's made a very critical change in her language ... I want her to explain that decision."

In the second conference Mr. Gantry also focused on the positive aspects of Tina's play and her writing development. He felt that he was giving her positive reinforcement. Tina recognized the praise and the lack of negative comment. "... He was referring to the good things that ... I'm doing other than the bad things and that I should keep them up." However, she recalled only two of the positive remarks Mr. Gantry had made: "... that I was using good words and punctuation."

Mr. Gantry felt that he was "... giving her a choice" when he asked Tina what she would like to improve next. Tina was aware that it was her choice, and that she was controlling the writing. Mr. Gantry didn't tell her what she should work on next because she "... might have a good



different idea that might be better to start with." If Mr. Gantry didn't like her idea, "he'd just leave it because it's my story, it's my play and if I want his help I'll like, I'll ask for it."

Mr. Gantry was "really happy" that Tina was perceptive enough to choose to work on paragraphing. "That's really encouraging because that is the one skill that will really help her writing right now and she was able to see it and it didn't have to be a teacher tell(ing) her or anything like that." Tina also chose spelling as an area in which she wanted to improve. This made Mr. Gantry realize that he had neglected to tell her that her spelling was improving. For this reason, he referred to her earlier work so that he could point out her improvement. "... That's one thing I hadn't mentioned so get back and look to show that ..." He felt that it was important that students "... realize they've got success and someone tells them they're good spellers, giving them confidence, again an attitude is far more important than telling them that this is what you're doing wrong." Tina understood the praise and the positive reinforcement "... like I'm really improving ... and I should keep it up."

Tina and Mr. Gantry had different understandings of what was involved in the focus on her use of quotation marks. Mr. Gantry had been debating with himself whether to inform Tina that quotation marks weren't necessary in play form. He decided not to. "I sort of thought it would be





negative and not very important." Tina felt that Mr. Gantry focused on the quotation marks because they had been talking about punctuation in the last conference and he was wondering if she had put in the punctuation.

Both Tina and Mr. Gantry were aware of humor or playfulness in each conference. Tina felt that "it was pretty funny" when Mr. Gantry acted out a phrase from her play. Mr. Gantry also recognized the playfulness. "... You should be able to laugh about a piece and share it, and that's sort of an audience reaction and you should be able to joke about pieces." At the end of the second conference, Mr. Gantry jokingly suggested to Tina that he had kept her too long and that she should stop fooling around and get back to writing. Tina understood that Mr. Gantry was not being serious. She said she felt happy and also "sort of funny" because the conference hadn't seemed long. Mr. Gantry said he had been "... trying to inject a bit of humor into it ... showing a little bit of fun rather than all serious work."

### Summary

Both Mr. Gantry and Tina had positive feelings about the conferences although their reasons for these feelings were different. One of Mr. Gantry and Tina's goals for the conferences was similar. Each felt the conference would provide Mr. Gantry with information about what Tina was doing in her writing. Tina had a very good understanding of Mr. Gantry's praise and positive reinforcement. She under-



stood what he was referring to and the implications behind the praise. Mr. Gantry commented several times that he was focusing on Tina's writing process. Mr. Gantry and Tina had different perceptions of Mr. Gantry's reference to the quotation marks in her piece. They had similar ideas concerning the ownership of Tina's writing. Both felt that it was Tina's piece and that it was she who would make the decisions about it. Mr. Gantry and Tina also recognized the playful moments in the conferences. It would appear that generally Mr. Gantry and Tina had similar perceptions of the conference.

#### Case 6: Lillian

##### Profile

##### Background Information

Lillian, a shy nine-year-old grade four student has attended Bowden School since grade one. Lillian has one older brother in junior high school.

Mr. Gantry feels that Lillian has average to above average ability but that her performance is hindered by a lack of confidence. Mr. Gantry describes Lillian's writing as average. She uses simple sentence structure, simple vocabulary and her stories have tended to be about her friend (Janet). Mr. Gantry felt that Lillian's writing was improving. She was starting to be more precise and to ask questions about her writing and to develop a sense of audience.



### Perceptions of Writing

Lillian thought that she was an "okay" writer. She felt Mr. Gantry might think she was a "good" writer because she used different words and a "bad" writer because she always forgets to indent. To become a better writer Lillian felt that she had to work on punctuation because she always forgot to indent.

Most of Lillian's criteria for a good or poor writer dealt with writing conventions and aesthetics. Poor writers "... don't indent and they just write down any old thing and they write it all sloppy and they don't put down the date on their story and they just put down any old thing they want to." Good writers "... indent, put a title and write it nicely and put all their punctuation in and write a good story." A good story was one that was interesting and perhaps funny. She identified a student in her room as a good writer because that person's story had been chosen for a television program. It had been an interesting story which contained different kinds of words.

### Perceptions of Writing Conferences in General

Lillian said that she liked individual conferences better than group ones. She didn't like waiting for the other students to have their turns in the group conferences.

Lillian felt that individual conferences are held to help students improve their writing. Conferences also have an evaluative function. The teachers read the story "...



and they tell you if they think it's good or bad. They don't usually think it's bad."

She explained that students sign up for individual conferences which are held at the student's desk during writing time. Mr. Gantry starts the conference by asking if the student needs help. Then "you just talk about your story, what you want done with it." Lillian said she wasn't sure how the conference ended, but she thought it was when the teacher was "finished with my story."

Lillian felt that a conference was good "... when they say you have good words and they make you feel good, like they say your story's good." The student's story was responsible for making a conference poor "when you don't have anything and there's no good words and it's sloppy." Lillian recalled a conference that she considered poor. It was when her story "wasn't good." Lillian felt that two things should happen in a conference. The teacher should ask questions and "say something is good."

## The Nature of Lillian's Writing Conferences

### Background

In both conferences, Lillian was working on drafts of a piece entitled, "Easter." It was a description of what she and her family did Easter Sunday. For the first conference she had written approximately three-quarters of a page. For the second conference she had written a full page third draft.





The conferences took place in the Resource Room with only the teacher, student and researcher present.

The conferences were examined for evidence of the six elements of scaffolding identified by Graves (1983c).

### Predictability

At the end of each conference, Mr. Gantry reviewed how Lillian might proceed with her composition. This appeared to be the only predictable structure in the conferences. The time, place and setting of the conferences were altered to accommodate the researcher and the teacher.

### Focus

At the beginning of the first conference, Mr. Gantry focused on two suggestions he had made in the practice conference. In comparing her first and second drafts he praised Lillian for getting her ideas down as fast as possible and for using precise language. "I think you've done that very well ... Here's where you're using a really nice word, when I said a better word, gobble -- I can get up and gobble down my breakfast. That's the type of word we're looking for ... You've done that very well."

Mr. Gantry tried to get Lillian to focus on her plans for her composition by asking, "What are you going to do now with this piece?" and "What sorts of things might you add on?" He also tried to draw Lillian's attention to the need for sentence structure revision. He asked her if she plan-



ned to leave her draft as it was. She indicated that that was what she planned. He then read the first sentence out loud and asked if that was indeed how she would write it. Lillian replied, "Yes." Mr. Gantry initially accepted that answer but returned to the question a moment later. This time he suggested that Lillian should consider changing it. "... Something you might want to think about when you're doing this is that it's not ... that easy to read the way it is. So you might have to make a few changes in there." He suggested that she finish her ideas first and then deal with the changes.

I'd finish all your ideas first about your aunt's house and ... once you've done that, go back and write ... on this piece of paper maybe with a pen so it shows up what you would change ... if you want to add a word or put in punctuation and then we'll go over it together. And if you have any questions ... we can talk about it then.

In the second conference Lillian indicated that she wanted to "fix up" her piece. She wanted to put in punctuation and make the beginning sound better. This latter point became a focus of the conference. Mr. Gantry asked Lillian questions to focus on the beginning of her piece. "What are some of the things you're going to look at first? What would you like your beginning to be about?"

Another focus of the second conference was Mr. Gantry's encouragement for Lillian to make some changes and to finish the piece. "Let's see if we can get a beginning and we can get really good words all the way through. You might want to change some of the words and change some of the sen-



tences." Mr. Gantry told Lillian that by the next Monday he wanted another draft which was completely reworded and which combined the two previous drafts.

### Demonstrable Solutions

In the first conference Lillian indicated that she wanted to include more information in her composition but she wasn't sure what she would include. Through questions Mr. Gantry suggested some possibilities.

Would you write things the way they happened or would you maybe make up a little bit as well ...? Do you sometimes combine Easter like maybe last Easter and this Easter and put the two together?

Earlier in the conference Mr. Gantry suggested combining her first and second drafts. "... You don't have to but ... that might be something, you can combine the two of these stories and get something." The decision to use any of the suggestions was Lillian's.

Through his questions and comments in the second conference, Mr. Gantry tried to have Lillian realize for herself how she might improve the beginning of her piece. "What would you like your beginning to be about? Why do you have to ... go back to bed, cause you never tell us? Well, couldn't you put that in?" Mr. Gantry also suggested that she refer to an earlier draft for more information. He formulated a possible introductory sentence by using Lillian's response to a question and the first sentence of a draft. "Now that might be your opening sentence right



there."

Mr. Gantry also used some oral brainstorming to elicit detail. "What sort of things are Easter candy? What kind of eggs? Are they real eggs?"

There were instances in the conferences where Mr. Gantry tried to lead Lillian to discover her own solutions. At other times he was more directive and made specific suggestions.

### Role Reversal

Lillian asked no questions in the first conference. Her responses to Mr. Gantry's questions were short and frequently only one word. There was only one instance where she initiated a comment.

In the second conference however there were many instances of role reversal. She initiated several comments and asked a few clarifying questions. The conference was more of a dialogue. Some examples of questions and comments Lillian initiated include "... Do I put that right there?" or "...I like the word gobble." "Maybe I'll take it home over the weekend." Also indicative of a more active role in the second conference was the fact that Lillian had a pencil in her hand and pointed out certain things on her paper. In the first conference she had kept her hands beneath the table.





### Nomenclature

Both Mr. Gantry and Lillian used terminology in relation to both the form and content of writing. Mr. Gantry mentioned word, sentences, periods, punctuation and final draft. He talked about information, ideas and publishing. Lillian indicated she wanted to write a better beginning and said she was going to put in punctuation.

### Humor or Playfulness

The second conference contained several examples of playfulness. Mr. Gantry added excitement and humor to his voice when responding to Lillian's comment that she had forgotten to add new information. He gestured dramatically while listing the places Lillian could hunt for Easter eggs. Lillian giggled in each incident.

### Other Features

The difference in Lillian's involvement in each conference was dramatic. In the first conference Lillian was quite passive. She initiated no comments or questions. She did appear however, to be listening intently. Her responses to Mr. Gantry's questions were short and often one-word replies. Lillian took a much more active part in the second conference. She asked a few questions, initiated comments and pointed out things on her paper. She was truly animated and the conference was much more of a dialogue.

Another feature of the conferences was the amount of



praise or positive reinforcement. In the first conference Mr. Gantry praised Lillian for getting her ideas down as fast as possible, for using more precise vocabulary and for including more detail.

I think you've done that very well ... here's where you're using a really nice word ... you're being a little bit more careful about ... the words you're using and I think the reader's understanding more about what you're saying.

In the second conference Mr. Gantry also praised Lillian's work and encouraged her to continue.

I think you've got the beginnings of a very good piece here. I would just play with it a little bit ... I like the word, "gobble" too ... see if you can get a few more words like that ... I think this piece is good enough to publish.

After Mr. Gantry's praise of the word, "gobble," Lillian made reference to it several times.

There were instances in the conferences when Mr. Gantry encouraged Lillian to retain control of her writing. He tried to lead her to discover her own solutions and to make decisions on her own. At other times he was much more directive and took the lead. The following incident illustrates the point. Lillian started one conference with her writing firmly in front of her but by the end of the conference, it was in front of Mr. Gantry and he was writing on it.

In summary, there was some evidence of the six elements of scaffolding in the conferences. There was only slight evidence of predictability. The conferences also had other



distinguishing features.

### Perceptions of Specific Writing Conferences:

#### Lillian and Mr. Gantry

Mr. Gantry and Lillian had similar feelings about the conferences although they expressed different reasons for their feelings. Mr. Gantry felt that in the first conference they "had covered a lot of things that had to be covered" and Lillian was "still on track." However he felt that "... with someone like (Lillian) you're never going to feel complete success because she's ... so passive, she accepts everything so ... you're really not sure what she's thinking cause she's not saying it ... when they're passive like that, you don't really get as good a feeling."

Lillian felt the first conference was "... okay, not the best one I've had." At first she said that she did not receive any help in the conference. Then she realized that she had because of her change in attitude about asking Mr. Gantry questions. "I got help in it cause I know now I can ask him questions ... Well I know I could ask him questions (before) I just didn't want to I guess."

Both Lillian and Mr. Gantry were much more enthusiastic about the second conference. Mr. Gantry was happy with Lillian's involvement. "I was really pleased with that conference in the sense that she made some decisions and she was verbal." Mr. Gantry said he didn't think he had ever seen Lillian as involved as she was. He also thought that



the conference was too long.

Lillian thought the second conference was "pretty good. This one was the best one I ever had." Asked why she felt it was her best, Lillian replied that this one was interesting because Mr. Gantry really liked her story. She also felt that in the other conferences "... he just didn't tell me what to do ... in all the other ones I didn't know what to do, well I knew what to do but not very much."

Lillian and Mr. Gantry had different perceptions of the goals or reasons for the conferences. One of Mr. Gantry's goals for both conferences was to follow up on points discussed in the previous conference. Another goal in the first conference was to keep Lillian "on track" and in the second conference he wanted Lillian to be ready for another draft.

Lillian felt that one reason for the conference was to provide Mr. Gantry with information about her writing "... cause he wanted to see what I was working on maybe ... to see if I changed my story." The conferences also had an evaluative function. "... Maybe he thought I was a good writer ... He wanted to know or maybe he thought I was a bad writer and he just wanted to know." Lillian also felt that the conferences were to help her in her writing "... so I could get it better and put in more interesting words."

Mr. Gantry and Lillian had different understandings of most of the focal points in the conferences. At the beginning of the first conference Mr. Gantry focused on changes





Lillian had made since the previous conference. He explained to the researcher why he read parts of Lillian's first and second drafts. He wanted her to "...hear the language she's used" and he was "drawing a comparison between the two." Lillian on the other hand felt Mr. Gantry wanted to read her pieces because "... he knows it was on tape ...." "He thought 'it would go faster'" and "... maybe he thought it was interesting."

Mr. Gantry also tried to focus on Lillian's plans and ideas for her piece. He asked what she might add in order to "give her a chance to speak ... to think about the ideas." There was a fairly long pause after she said she'd add more about her aunt's house. Mr. Gantry said that he "... was just trying to see if she really wanted to say more."

Mr. Gantry tried to draw Lillian's attention to the need for sentence structure revision. After Lillian indicated that she hadn't planned any revisions, Mr. Gantry read her first sentence out loud and checked with her again. "I wanted to draw her attention to it. I wanted to see if she could come up with 'Maybe I might change it a little bit.' " Lillian didn't understand that Mr. Gantry wanted her to make a commitment to change things. She thought he was merely inquiring if she was going to change it or not. She felt he also had another reason to read it. "... Because he wanted ...to read the gobble part again ... He wanted to see ... if I was going to keep it that way or change it." As much



as Mr. Gantry wanted her to change the piece, he also wanted her to maintain control of the piece of writing.

She made a decision here. For the time being I have to accept it ... If I started saying, 'No you can't do that!' then ... (Lillian's) going to be really happy about that because she ... doesn't have a lot of confidence in herself. 'Hey, somebody's making a decision for me, isn't that great?' I think she needs a lot of acceptance ... you know, just really work on the positive.

Later in the conference, Mr. Gantry told Lillian that the piece wasn't easy to read the way it was and she might have to make a few changes. Mr. Gantry did not feel that he was being directive. "I haven't made any real decision for her about it ..." He was "... slowly letting her know that there might be a little bit to do, something to think about." Lillian commented about the section. "Mr. Gantry ... didn't think ... it was as understanding as before." She was going to change it because "... it would sound better."

At the end of the conference Mr. Gantry focused on what Lillian should do next. He felt that he was "... giving her something to think about and reinforcing the fact that ... it's all right to come and ask questions." He "... was telling her what she might do ... what she has to look forward to as far as what she can expect from me and what I expect from her ..."

Lillian did not seem to grasp all of what Mr. Gantry was intending in this section. Her comments were rather vague. "... He just wanted me to make it better there ... I should write it a little better and put it in a dark pen."



She did have a clear understanding of his offer to help her with any questions she might have in the next conference.

In the second conference Mr. Gantry asked several focus questions to help Lillian decide what she might include in her piece. In reference to one question Mr. Gantry said that he was

... trying to get her to make a decision about her work on her own ... She's got to start thinking about this piece as hers and that it's not good enough just to say I'd like to fix it up.

Lillian was unaware of Mr. Gantry's concern with ownership. "... He just wanted to know what my beginning was going to be."

Lillian explained why she thought Mr. Gantry referred to her earlier piece during the conference. "... Maybe he liked that part and he wanted me to put that in." She was aware, however, that it was her decision. "He just wanted to know if I was going to put it back in. He didn't care if I wasn't ..."

Lillian realized that Mr. Gantry was encouraging her to finish her piece. "... He just wanted me to finish it for him." Mr. Gantry explained that his comments meant "Let's get to work, kid. Let's do some writing."

Lillian and Mr. Gantry's understandings of some of the solutions he proposed were quite different. Through his questions Mr. Gantry had tried to suggest some possibilities for including more information. Mr. Gantry asked Lillian if she was thinking of combining her stories. He felt he was



"... drawing her attention to the fact that these might be combined." Lillian's perceptions were "... maybe he thought that it would sound better if I made up a little bit." When Mr. Gantry asked if she might make up things or combine Easters, he felt he was "... trying to give her some ideas, something to think about ... possible direction." Lillian thought that he mentioned it because he "... thought both Easters would sound good together."

Mr. Gantry was concerned that Lillian retain ownership of her writing. He felt that Lillian was "very accepting ... She's still at the point where somebody can tell her what to do." When she responded, "Yeah, okay." to a suggestion that she could combine two sentences, Mr. Gantry said that he

very quickly backtracked there and I tried to take myself out of it because here I was making decisions about her piece and she was accepting that ... and I didn't want that ... so I said that was just an idea ... I wanted to make it very clear to her that ... that's a decision you'll have to make. I'm not making that decision for you.

Lillian understood that she didn't have to combine the sentences if she didn't want to.

In the second conference Mr. Gantry asked Lillian some questions about details she had not included in her piece. Mr. Gantry felt that

... whether she uses that (the information) or not, she's still using her language to give information and to make things clear ... if we can get her to transfer all of this clarification into her writing, then we have her doing what we want her to do ...

Lillian felt that Mr. Gantry asked her the questions because





"he wanted me to maybe put that in and that's why he says all that." Lillian was also aware of her control of the piece. "... I don't have to but he just wanted to know if I was going to ..." Mr. Gantry formulated a possible introductory sentence for Lillian. He felt that they were "... examining possibilities, choices that she might have."

Mr. Gantry was very much aware of the comments and questions Lillian initiated in the second conference.

At this point I'm quite happy with what she's doing. This seems to be the first time that she's really sort of verbalized ... there's discussion, a bit of dialogue. She's not sitting there waiting for me anymore and she's ... volunteering information.

... She's bringing forth a question ... so she's now involved in the ... conversation.

Both Mr. Gantry and Lillian were aware of some playfulness in the second conference. Mr. Gantry commented about one incident. "So we did get some humor in there finally." He also thought that Lillian was "getting a little fun out of it anyway." Lillian did not comment on that specific incident but she felt that Mr. Gantry thought the second conference was funny "... because he was laughing a whole bunch and ... he was being funny."

Mr. Gantry was very cognizant of the praise and encouragement he gave Lillian. Commenting about his praise for using the word, "gobble," Mr. Gantry said that he was giving her "positive reinforcement" for using precise, picturesque language and "... hopefully she'll continue on and maybe think of a few more words like that in there." Lillian



understood the praise. "... He liked the word, "gobble" because he said it was interesting ... and he thought people would like my story better because it had this interesting word in it."

Mr. Gantry explained that in his comments at the end of the conference, he was trying to "... pick out the positive things that she's done in her writing ... reinforcing ... trying to give her a model." Lillian understood the praise. "He thinks the readers are understanding my writing more because I put in more details instead of what I used to before."

In the second conference Lillian referred to the word, "gobble" several times. She also told the researcher that "... me and him both like 'gobble'." Mr. Gantry noticed that Lillian had made reference to the word three times. "I think that shows where in a conference ... giving a child positive reinforcement really builds them up." Lillian appeared to misinterpret Mr. Gantry's comment that she had the beginnings of a very good piece. She thought that "... maybe he wanted me to change the bottom part because I hadn't put a lot of the stuff I was supposed to put in." Although Mr. Gantry did want her to make some changes, he wasn't referring specifically to that section. He "... wanted her to realize that she's not nearly finished ... I want her to realize that there's some work ahead of her."



### Summary

Lillian and Mr. Gantry's feelings about the conferences were similar although they expressed different reasons for their feelings. They had different perceptions of the goals or reasons for the conferences and different understandings of most of the focal points. Mr. Gantry was concerned that Lillian retain ownership of her writing. Both felt that it was Lillian who would make decisions about her writing. Both Mr. Gantry and Lillian were aware of some playfulness in the second conference. Lillian usually understood Mr. Gantry's praise. She did misinterpret his comment about the beginnings of a very good piece. Mr. Gantry was very cognizant of the difference in Lillian's involvement in the conferences. Some of Lillian and Mr. Gantry's perceptions of the conferences were similar; others were very different. There appears to be no discernable pattern.

### Summary

In this chapter, profiles of the three teachers and case studies of the six students were presented. The teacher profiles were comprised of descriptions of their classroom situations, professional backgrounds and writing programs as well as an account of their perceptions of conferences in general.

The students' case studies contained information about the students' backgrounds, perceptions of writing and perceptions of conferences in general. The nature of the



specific conferences was reported as were the students' and teachers' perceptions of the specific conferences.





## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION OF THE DATA IN TERMS OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

#### Overview

In Chapter Four, the data was examined in reference to the individual case studies. In this chapter, the data from all cases is pooled and examined in reference to the research questions. The data reported in the individual case studies is combined and compared under nine general headings: Teachers' Perceptions of Writing Conferences in General, Students' Perceptions of Writing Conferences in General, Congruence between the Teachers' Perceptions and the Students' Perceptions of Writing Conferences in General, Teachers' Perceptions of Specific Writing Conferences, Students' Perceptions of Specific Writing Conferences, Congruence between Teachers' Perceptions and Students' Perceptions of Specific Writing Conferences, The Nature of the Observed Writing Conferences, Congruence between the Teacher's Perceptions of Writing Conferences and the Nature of the Observed Conferences, and Congruence between the Students' Perceptions of Writing Conferences and the Nature of the Observed Conferences.



## Teachers' Perceptions of Writing Conferences in General

All three teachers viewed a conference as an opportunity to help the child with his writing. Two teachers also mentioned that it was an opportunity for the teacher to learn what the child was doing in his writing.

All three teachers said that they used conferences because they allowed for individual instruction and personal contact with students. One teacher also cited as reasons the fact that she was seeing good results and that the children felt she was placing an importance on their writing.

The three teachers expressed positive feelings about conferences. Two teachers said they enjoyed them and one "loved them." One teacher mentioned two negative aspects of conferences. She said that it was sometimes difficult to maintain interest if the story was boring and that conferences were draining in that they required a high energy level.

One teacher felt her students liked conferences. The two other teachers thought that their students had likely not thought about them, one way or another.

All three teachers thought that the students' active participation in the conference was a factor in determining its quality. All three wished the students to be in control. Two teachers mentioned that the child should ask questions and do most of the talking in a conference. Two



teachers mentioned that because there were different purposes for conferences, sometimes different factors were desirable. For example, one teacher felt that at the beginning of a piece of writing it was important for the child to have an opportunity to explore his ideas through talking. Later in his piece it might be more important for the teacher to help the student with a specific skill. The other teacher explained how her role varied in conferences. Sometimes she might give encouragement or moral support, other times she might teach specific skills or strategies.

Other desirable features in a conference which the teachers referred to include the teacher identifying something to help the student with, the student learning something to improve his writing, and a trusting relationship between the teacher and student so that the student is open to criticism.

The three teachers were aware that the time and setting of their conferences were predictable. They were also cognizant of predictable structures they used to begin and close a conference.

In summary, the teachers' perceptions of conferences in general were similar in respect to the purpose of conferences, their general feelings about conferences, predictable elements in conferences and factors affecting the quality of conferences. Each teacher also mentioned other thoughts or feelings which appeared to reflect their own particular beliefs and/or teaching style.



## Students' Perceptions of Writing Conferences in General

Five of the students thought that conferences were held in order to help students with their writing. Two students said that the purpose of a conference was to provide the teacher with information about a student's writing.

All of the students had positive feelings about conferences. Four students said they liked conferences, one said they were "good" and one said they were "okay." The reasons the students felt the way they did varied. One student mentioned that she liked having someone to talk to. Another said he picked up ideas and liked knowing what other students wrote. Three students mentioned that it was because they received help during the conferences. One student also mentioned that he didn't like having to wait for a conference.

The students' perceptions of what factors determined the quality of a conference varied considerably. Factors they identified include: 1) the teacher asking a lot of challenging questions, 2) the teacher saying the story is good, 3) the teacher listening, 4) the person you conference with, 5) the student identifying a problem, 6) the student wanting to talk about his story, 7) the student cooperating, 8) the student being able to answer all the questions, and 9) a good story. Three students felt that a good story was important while the other factors were each mentioned only once.





From the students' responses, inferences can be drawn about who they feel is responsible for the quality of a conference. Two students placed the responsibility for a good conference solely on the teacher, two students felt it depended on the student and the story. One placed responsibility on both student and teacher and one felt it depended on the teacher and story.

For all the students, the setting and time for conferences were predictable. All of the students felt that a conference began with an opening question from the teacher. Five students felt the conference ended when the student no longer needed any help or when the teacher had checked to see if everything was all right.

In summary, students' perceptions of conferences in general were similar in respect to one of the purposes of conferences, the positive feelings about conferences and some predictable elements of conferences. Differences in their perceptions were noted in respect to some of the reasons for their positive feelings and the factors affecting the quality of conferences.

#### Congruence Between the Teachers' Perceptions and Students' Perceptions of Writing Conferences in General

The three teachers and five of the six students viewed a conference as an opportunity for the student to receive help with his writing. Two of the three teachers and two of



the six students said that the conference also provided the teacher with information about the student's writing.

All the teachers and students have positive feelings about conferences. Only one teacher and one student mentioned any negative aspects.

All of the teachers but no student said that the student's active participation was a factor in considering the quality of a conference. No student made reference to controlling a conference. Although three students mentioned that the student's story affected the quality of a conference, no teacher felt that the story was a factor. One student was even more specific. She felt that receiving a positive evaluation of her story was a factor.

All the students and teachers found the conference time, setting and opening predictable. Only one student was unsure of the conference closure.

#### Teachers' Perceptions of Specific Writing Conferences

The teachers expressed positive feelings for all but one of the conferences. Some examples of their comments include "I thought they were both good conferences," "... it went better than I expected ...," "I liked it," "(I felt) really good about it ...," and "... we accomplished quite a bit." The teachers' reasons for their positive feelings varied considerably. Some of the reasons included a child being uncharacteristically verbal, a child demonstrating



trust by sharing a personal piece of writing, a child learning something about writing and the teacher gaining insight into the child's writing. In one case, the teacher had "mixed feelings" concerning a conference. The teacher felt that it had the potential for a good learning experience but was uncertain how much the child would retain because of the child's attitude and behavior.

In four cases, the teacher felt that one goal for the conference was obtaining information about the child's writing. In five cases, the teacher stated or implied that helping the child with his writing was a goal. Other goals included providing positive reinforcement, teaching specific skills and strategies, and providing the child with an opportunity to talk about his writing.

Two of the teachers were aware of predictable structures in their conferences and pointed these out to the researcher. For example, one teacher explained that "How's it going?" is her standard opening question. In four cases the teachers commented on the students' awareness of predictable structures in conferences. For example, one teacher explained to the researcher that the student was able to initiate the conference because she had anticipated the predictable opening question. Another teacher explained that the student had interjected and spelled a word because she knew "what was supposed to happen."

In five cases the teachers commented on playful or humorous moments in the conferences. For example, one



teacher explained to the researcher that although her sense of humor differed considerably from the students', she would not interfere unless it was "really gross." Another teacher's comments reflect his desire to have playful moments in a conference. "So we did get some humor in there finally." Sometimes the teachers merely pointed out playful incidents without offering explanations. For example, one teacher pointed out, "She's getting enjoyment there."

In four cases, the teachers commented on gaining insight into the child's writing process and development through the conference. For example, one teacher noticed that her student's requests for help departed from the previous pattern and that the student seemed to be "moving on to another stage." Another teacher discovered the student's strategy for including additional information and for deciding how to proceed with the story. The teacher commented that the student had revealed how she got her ideas and how she ended a story.

All of the teachers made comments which suggested that a consideration of the student's individual differences affected what they did in conferences.

In every case the teacher referred to the student maintaining ownership of his writing. The following examples of teachers' comments illustrate their desire for students to control their writing. "...I wanted it to be her choice ... I want her to be the owner of the story." "I'm trying to get her to make a decision about her work on her





own ..." "I want to find out what Charlene's purpose is for the conference and we'll start from that." Although each teacher commented on ownership, two in particular appeared to stress it.

Although there are some general themes around which teachers' perceptions can be grouped, each teacher also had unique perceptions. For example, Mrs. Winter explained her dilemma concerning what and how to teach some punctuation rules. She revealed how her consideration of the child's writing development and her knowledge of the writing process affected what she said in conferences. Mr. Gantry expressed the importance he places on praise, positive reinforcement, and humor. Mrs. Miller frequently commented on the child being aware of his own writing process.

In summary, it would appear that the teachers usually had positive feelings about conferences although their reasons for their feelings differed. They usually felt that two of the goals for the conferences were to help the student with his writing and to obtain information about the student's writing. In most cases, the teachers felt their students were aware of predictable structures. Teachers usually noted playful moments in conferences and usually felt they gained insight into the students' writing. All of the teachers were concerned with the students maintaining ownership of their writing. Each teacher also had unique perceptions which appeared to reflect the nature of the specific conference as well as their own particular beliefs



and/or teaching styles.

### Students' Perceptions of Specific Writing Conferences

Most of the students had very positive feelings about both of their conferences. One student even stated that one conference was "the best she ever had." The students reasons for their positive feelings varied considerably and to a large extent reflected the particular nature of their conference. The following reasons exemplify the extent of variation. One student enjoyed the praise, another felt she received help with ideas, one liked the lack of noise during the conference, one felt she now wanted to ask the teacher questions and one stated it was fun to tell what he had written. One student felt that one of his conferences was "bad" because his story wasn't any good.

Five students felt that the conferences were held in order to provide their teachers with information about their writing. For example, one student commented "... she wants to find out about my writing." A student suggested the teacher could assess his progress in skills "to see ... how my punctuation's going along cause this year I wasn't too good at punctuation and I started ... getting better." One student felt that a conference could be a form of evaluation, the teacher wanted to know if she was a "good" or "bad" writer.

Five of the students either commented or implied that receiving help with their writing was another purpose. Some



of the other reasons students mentioned include for the student to complete his piece, for the teacher to check on punctuation, and to help the researcher.

Four students commented on the predictable opening structures and indicated an awareness of what the structures entailed. Referring to parts of the videotaped conferences, three students explained to the researcher that their teacher was "receiving" their story. Although the three students could explain what receiving entailed, two did not understand why their teacher did it.

Five of the students commented on playful moments in the conferences. For example, one student commented on her teacher's exaggerated gestures during one part of the conference. "... It was pretty funny." Another student felt his teacher had found parts of his story "funny" because she laughed when he told her about them.

Five of the six students made reference to ownership of their writing. The other student's comments concerning his decision to work on another piece implied a sense of ownership. The students felt that they made decisions about their writing. The following examples illustrate their awareness of ownership. One student commented that the teacher hadn't told her what to do "... because it's my story." Another student explained to the researcher that she would be able to use an idea even if the teacher didn't like it. "He'd just leave it (the idea), because it's my story, it's my play and if I want his help, I'll like, I'll



ask for it." Another student assured the researcher that he would decide which ideas to use. "Yeah, oh yeah, we get to make the decisions." Some of the students commented on ownership more frequently than others.

The highly individual nature of some of the students' perceptions was also very evident. For example, Darren revealed his extensive knowledge about his own writing process. He was aware of the origin of some of his ideas and expressions, he realized he liked to think out the whole plot before writing and that he liked to have lots of time to write. Edgar's comments suggest that he is very attuned to slight nuances in his teacher's behavior. He thought that his teacher had spoken differently in one conference and that this indicated she thought it was boring. Diane was very much aware of her own writing process and is also cognizant of writing problems other students encounter. Lillian realized that she not only could ask questions but that she now wanted to.

In summary, the children usually had positive feelings about their conferences with varied reasons for their feelings. They usually felt that two of the purposes of the conferences were to provide the teacher with information about their writing and to receive help. Most of the students were aware of predictable structures and playful moments in conferences. All students felt they had ownership of their writing. Some of the students' perceptions appeared to highlight the individual student's strengths





and/or personality.

Congruence Between the Teachers' Perceptions and  
the Students' Perceptions of Specific Writing Conferences

In five cases, the teachers and students had similar feelings about the conferences. Usually these feelings were positive. The teachers and students' reasons for their feelings varied considerably. The reasons the teachers cited appeared to be more global in nature. The teachers seemed to view the child and his writing as a whole whereas the students' reasons were more concrete and narrower in scope. For example a teacher was pleased that a child had demonstrated trust by sharing a personal piece of writing. The same student thought the conference was good because she completed her poem and because it was quiet.

In most cases, both teachers and students included as goals for a conference providing the teacher with information about a student's writing and helping the student with his writing. Thus both the teacher and the student had a role as a learner in the conferences. Although the students did not mention many other goals, those they did cite were different from the additional goals mentioned by the teachers. For example, one teacher wanted to provide positive reinforcement, another mentioned providing the child with an opportunity to speak about his writing. One student felt a conference could have an evaluative function. It is inter-



esting that no teacher and no other student considered a conference in terms of evaluation of a student's writing.

In four cases, both the students and teachers commented on predictable structures. Their perceptions were usually very similar.

In five cases, both the teachers and students commented on playful or humorous moments. Sometimes the teachers' comments also revealed beliefs such as the importance of humor in a conference or the importance of the child retaining ownership of his writing.

All of the teachers and five of the six students made reference to a student maintaining ownership of his writing. Some difference in the emphasis placed on this feature was noticed. The one student's comments about his decision to work on a different piece of writing implied a sense of ownership.

In four cases the teachers commented on the insight thus gained into a student's writing through the conferences.

As indicated, some of the students' and the teachers' perceptions of specific conferences could be grouped around general themes. However, some of their other perceptions were distinct and uniquely a part of the individual concerned. For example, Mrs. Winter explained her dilemma in teaching punctuation and Darren revealed his extensive knowledge about his own writing process.

In the next section of this chapter, the nature of the



specific writing conferences is examined.

### The Nature of the Observed Writing Conferences

The videotapes and transcripts of the conferences were examined for evidence of the six elements of scaffolding identified by Graves (1982, 1983c). Other distinguishing features were also noted.

#### Predictability

In every conference there was evidence of at least one predictable structure. Some of the conferences contained several predictable features including such things as predictable time, place, and setting, predictable opening and ending structures and receiving. The most common predictable features were the opening and closing of conferences. For example, Mrs. Miller began her conferences with the predictable question, "How's it going?" Mrs. Winter asked, "What would you like to work on today?" Conferences frequently ended with the teacher asking the student if he had any questions or if everything was all right.

#### Focus

In most conferences, there was a focus on at least two aspects of the child's work. Sometimes a focus was deter-



mined by what the child requested help with. At other times, the teacher focused on aspects of the child's writing that he/she had observed. Both the teacher and the student appeared to influence the particular focus of the conference. There was a focus in the conferences on the form and the content of a piece of writing as well as on the child's particular writing process.

### Demonstrable Solutions

In five of the six cases the teachers demonstrated solutions to the students' problems. Sometimes the teachers asked questions which led the child to verbalize his own solution. For example, Mrs. Miller asked Diane how she might include some missing information in her narrative. Diane then offered her own solution; that is, writing it at the bottom of a page and then drawing an arrow to indicate where it should go. Sometimes the teachers were more directive in their help. For example, Mrs. Winter suggested to Edgar that he change his play to story form. The specific kind of help the teachers gave their students varied considerably. Students received help with the form and the content of a piece of writing as well as with general writing strategies.





### Role Reversal

Most of the students were actively involved in the conferences, asking questions and initiating comments. One student however asked no questions and initiated very few comments. Another student showed a dramatic change in her involvement from one conference to the next.

### Nomenclature

In all cases, both teachers and students used terminology specific to writing. Children and teachers talked about form content and writing strategies.

### Humor

In all cases there was evidence of humor or playfulness although the initiation varied. Sometimes the teacher or student reacted to a humorous part in the piece of writing and sometimes the teacher or student initiated comments or made a gesture.

### Other Features

Although there were common elements in the conferences, there were also distinguishing or unique features about each. These features frequently stood out above all others



and gave the conferences a distinct and novel flavor. For example, in one case, what was overwhelmingly evident was the amount of teacher praise. In another case, the teacher appeared to really focus on the child's writing process, intent on bringing the child's knowledge of her writing to a conscious level. In another case there was abundant evidence of the child maintaining ownership of her writing.

In three cases there was a real difference between the first and second conference. In one case the child was less involved and inattentive during his second conference. In another case the child became uncharacteristically involved in her second conference. In a third case the student appeared to be less confident and less poised in his second conference.

### Summary

There was evidence of the six elements of scaffolding: predictability, focus, demonstrable solution, role reversal, nomenclature, and playfulness in all but one case study. There was no evidence of demonstrable solution in one case. There was a considerable difference in the extent and the nature of the evidence for these six elements. The conferences also had unique or distinguishing features.



Congruence Between the Teachers' Perception of Writing  
Conferences and the Nature of the Observed Conferences

The data was analyzed only in terms of broad consistencies in the teachers' perceptions of conferences and the researcher's analyses of what actually transpired in the specific conferences.

Mrs. Miller

The researcher noted five areas in which the teacher's perceptions matched the researcher's perceptions. These areas of consistency which the researcher observed in both the students' conferences include the students actively participating in the conferences, the students maintaining ownership of their writing, the students receiving help with their writing, the students revealing their writing process and the presence of predictable structures.

Mrs. Winter

There were five areas in which the teacher's perceptions were similar to the researcher's analyses of the nature of the conferences. These areas include the the students receiving help, the students learning something about writing, the teacher's attempts to have the student retain ownership of the writing, one student's lack of



interest and participation in a conference and the presence of predictable structures.

### Mr. Gantry

Areas of consistency evident in the conferences include evidence of positive reinforcement and praise, evidence of humor or playfulness, the focus on the writing process and the amount of student participation in the conferences.

The researcher felt there were three areas of inconsistency. 1) The conferences did not contain the predictable structures Mr. Gantry had spoken of in reference to conferences in general. 2) Mr. Gantry had commented that the student should do most of the talking in a conference. This was not always the case. 3) Although Mr. Gantry felt that he had not been directive in suggesting that a student revise part of her story, the researcher felt that this had been the case.

### Summary

All of the teachers said that they used conferences because the conferences allowed for individual instruction and personal contact with students. Both were observed in the conferences.

On the whole it would appear that the teachers' perceptions of conferences were usually consistent with the re-





searcher's analyses of the nature of the conferences.

Congruence Between A Student's Perceptions  
of Conferences and the Nature of the Observed Conferences

The students did not comment on or were unaware of many of the details included in the researcher's analyses of the nature of the conferences. Thus the data was analyzed only in terms of broad consistencies and/or inconsistencies between the student's perceptions of conferences and the researcher's analyses of the conferences.

Diane

Diane had identified three goals which were subsequently realized during her conferences. Mrs. Miller was able to obtain information about her writing and she was able to check if Diane had problems. Diane was also able to receive help. Diane's perceptions of the predictable time, setting and structures were also evident in the conferences. Both Diane and the researcher felt that she had control over her writing and was responsible for making the decisions concerning it. Some of Diane's criteria for determining the quality of a conference were also evident in the conferences. She informed the teacher about her writing and she was able to answer all the questions.



Darren

The researcher felt that Darren's goals for the conferences were realized. He received help and Mrs. Miller obtained information about his writing. Mrs. Miller also asked a lot of questions which Darren felt was a criteria for determining the quality of a conference. Darren's perceptions of the predictable time, setting and structure were evident in the conference. Both Darren and the researcher felt that many questions focused on his writing process.

Charlene

The researcher felt that two of the goals Charlene had for her conferences were met. She received help and she was able to complete her poem. Both Charlene and the researcher felt that she had ownership of her writing and was able to make decisions concerning it. Charlene's perceptions of the predictable opening and closing structures were evident in the conferences.

Edgar

The researcher felt that two of Edgar's goals for conferences were realized. The teacher obtained information about his writing and he received help. Edgar also thought a purpose for a conference was to enable the teacher to check on his punctuation. However, no reference was made to punc-



tuation in either of Edgar's conferences. Edgar stated that a conference would be poor if the student's story was boring. The student would then look around and not pay attention in the conference. This was, in fact, exactly what Edgar did during one of his conferences where he thought his story was boring. Edgar's perceptions of the predictable opening and closing were evident in his conferences.

### Tina

The researcher felt that Tina's three goals for specific conferences were realized during her conferences. Mr. Gantry did find out what she was doing, Tina claimed that the conferences had helped her to improve, and the researcher was indeed helped. Tina cited receiving help with a problem as one of the purposes for conferences in general. She also felt one criteria for determining the quality of a conference was the ability to identify a problem. Tina however did not have a particular problem in either of her conferences. Some of her other criteria for a good conference were met. The student did cooperate and the teacher did listen. Tina was aware of the praise which was so evident in her conferences. The conferences did not contain the predictable closing Tina referred to in her interview concerning her perceptions of conferences in general.



## Lillian

The researcher felt that two of Lillian's goals were realized during the conferences. Mr. Gantry was provided with information about her writing and she did receive help. The researcher was unable to determine if Mr. Gantry discovered if she was a "good" writer or "bad" writer, which Lillian felt might be a purpose for the conference. One of Lillian's criteria for determining the quality of a conference was receiving a positive evaluation of her story. Mr. Gantry did in fact praise her story. Lillian was aware of the praise which was very evident in her conferences. There was no evidence of the predictable opening structure Lillian had referred to in her interview concerning her perceptions of conferences in general.

In general it would appear that the students' perceptions of conferences were usually consistent with the researcher's observations of the nature of the conferences. The researcher however noted other aspects of the conferences for which the student made no comments.

## Summary

This chapter has examined the data from across the case studies in reference to the research questions. In the next chapter a summary of the study is presented, followed by conclusions and implications.





## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

#### Overview

In this chapter a summary of the study is outlined including the purpose and procedures used for gathering and analyzing the data. Conclusions are presented in reference to the research questions. Implications for educational practice and directions for further research are considered in the concluding section of the chapter.

#### Summary of the Study

##### Purpose

The purpose of the study was to examine 1) students' and teachers' perceptions of writing conferences; 2) the nature of observed writing conferences; and 3) the congruence among teachers' perceptions, students' perceptions, and the analyses of the nature of the observed writing conferences.

##### Procedures for Gathering and Analyzing Data

Each of the six students and three teachers involved in the study were interviewed at least twice concerning their perceptions of writing conferences in general and other background information. Three conferences between each



student and his teacher were videotaped, with the first considered a practice session.

Information concerning students' and teachers' perceptions of specific conferences was obtained through pre- and post- conference interviews and stimulated recall interviews. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The transcriptions were examined and verbatim excerpts identified. The videotapes and transcripts of the conferences were examined for evidence of the six elements of scaffolding (Graves 1982, 1983c) and for other distinguishing features. The findings were reported in case study format. Data from across the cases was also examined in reference to the research questions.

### Conclusions

The small number of subjects and conferences used in this study limits its generalizability. However, within the confines of these restrictions, certain patterns emerged and conclusions can be reached concerning teachers' and students' perceptions of writing conferences, the nature of writing conferences and the congruence between teachers' perceptions, students' perceptions and the nature of conferences. The conclusions are presented in the form of responses to the research questions with which the study was concerned.

1. What are the teachers' perceptions of writing con-



ferences in general?

The teachers' perceptions of conferences in general were similar in regards to the purpose of conferences, their general feelings about conferences, predictable elements in conferences and factors affecting the quality of conferences.

All three teachers viewed a conference as an opportunity to help the child with his writing. All said they used conferences because they allowed for individual instruction and personal contact with students. The teachers all had positive feelings about conferences. All teachers felt that there were predictable elements in their conferences. Each teacher felt that it was important for the students to actively participate in the conference and to maintain control of his writing. In addition, each teacher mentioned other thoughts or feelings which appeared to reflect their own particular beliefs and/or teaching style. For example, one teacher mentioned that a trusting relationship was important in conferences, another teacher mentioned that conferences required a high energy level.

2. What are the students' perceptions of writing conferences in general?

Most of the students felt that conferences were held to help them with their writing. A few students mentioned that the conferences provided the teacher with information about the student's writing. All students found that some aspects



including the setting time and opening structure of their conferences were predictable. All students had positive feelings about conferences, although their reasons for these feelings sometimes differed. While three students cited receiving help as a reason, other students mentioned such things as having someone to talk to and picking up ideas. The students' perceptions of the factors affecting the quality of a conference were quite varied. Only one factor was mentioned more than once. Three students felt that the story affected the quality of the conference.

It would appear that there are some commonalities amongst the students' perceptions of conferences in general. At the same time, there are some distinct differences.

3. What is the congruence between the teachers' perceptions and the students' perceptions in general?

There was some congruence between the teachers' and students' perceptions of the purposes of conferences. All of the students and teachers had positive feelings about conferences. There was also a high degree of congruence between the teachers' and students' perceptions of predictable elements of conferences. There was no congruence in regard to the students' and teachers' perceptions of factors which affected the quality of a conference. They differed in their perceptions of the role of the student, the teacher, and the story in conferences. For example, three students but no teachers felt the story was an important fac-





tor. All of the teachers felt the student's active participation was essential. One student felt receiving a positive evaluation was important.

4. What are the teachers' perceptions of specific writing conferences?

Except in one case, the teachers expressed positive feelings about the specific conferences. However, their reasons for these positive feelings varied considerably, including such reasons as a student demonstrating trust by sharing a personal piece of writing or a student being more actively involved in the conference. The teachers' goals for the conferences usually included helping the child with his writing and obtaining information about the child's writing. Some teachers also had other goals as well, such as providing positive reinforcement or helping the student maintain ownership of his writing. In most cases the teachers felt that their students were aware of predictable structures in conferences. The teachers usually noted playful or humorous moments in conferences. Usually the teachers commented on gaining insight into the child's writing process and development. In every case the teachers referred to the child maintaining ownership of his writing.

In addition, each teacher also had unique perceptions which appeared to reflect the nature of the specific conference, his or her own particular teaching style and/or beliefs about writing. For example, one teacher explained her



dilemma concerning the teaching of punctuation.

5. What are the students' perceptions of specific writing conferences?

Most of the students had positive feelings about their conferences, although the reasons for their feelings differed considerably. Whereas one student enjoyed receiving praise, another appreciated the lack of noise. The students usually included providing the teacher with information about their writing and receiving help as purposes for the conferences. The students sometimes mentioned other goals as well. Most of the students commented on some predictable structure(s) in their conferences. Almost all of the students commented on humorous or playful moments in their conferences. All students directly or indirectly made reference to ownership of their writing.

Some of the students' perceptions of the conferences appeared to highlight their individual strengths and personalities. One student for example revealed his extensive knowledge about writing and his own writing process.

6. What is the congruence between the teacher's perceptions and the student's perceptions of specific writing conferences?

The teachers and students usually had similar feelings about the conferences although the reasons for their feelings differed considerably. While one teacher was pleased



with the student's involvement in a conference, the student was pleased that the teacher liked her story. There was a high degree of congruence between the teacher's and student's perceptions of the two major goals of the conferences, which were to help the student with his writing and to provide the teacher with information about the student's writing. Additional goals mentioned by the teachers and students were dissimilar. Most of the students and teachers were aware of predictable structures in the conferences. The teachers and students usually noted humorous or playful moments in the conferences. There was a high degree of congruence between the teachers' and the students' perceptions of ownership of a piece of writing. Both students and teachers expressed thoughts and ideas which were individual in nature and which could not be grouped around general themes.

7. What is the nature of the observed writing conferences?

In each case study evidence of predictability, focus, role reversal, nomenclature and humor or playfulness was observed. Evidence of demonstrable solution was observed in five of the six case studies. The extent and nature of the evidence varied considerably. In addition to the six elements, other distinguishing features were noted about the conferences, such as the amount of teacher praise or a heavy focus on the student's writing process. These features



frequently gave the conference a particular tone or flavor.

8. What is the congruence between the teacher's perceptions of writing conferences and the nature of the conferences?

Each teacher's perceptions of the specific writing conferences was usually consistent with the researcher's observation of the nature of the conferences. Only three inconsistencies were noted with a teacher's perceptions and the researcher's observations.

9. What is the congruence between the student's perceptions of writing conferences and the nature of the observed conferences?

Each student's perceptions of conferences was usually consistent with the researcher's observations of the nature of the conferences. The researcher, however, noted features of the conferences which the students did not comment upon. Students' comments on the nature of the conferences in which they were involved were sometimes rather limited.

#### Implications for Educational Practice

The results of the study have some implications for the teaching of writing and for the conducting of writing conferences.

The researcher observed that during the conferences the students were given many opportunities to make decisions





about their writing and were also reminded of their choices. All of the students directly or indirectly made reference to ownership of their writing. These findings suggest that the use of conferences promotes students' expectations of ownership of their writing.

Students' perceptions of factors affecting the quality of a conference differed considerably from the teachers' perceptions in terms of the role of the teacher, the student and the story in a conference. These findings suggest that the conference participants should be given an opportunity to clarify their understanding of each other's ideas, opinions and expectations of conferences. Conferences could become a topic for classroom discussion.

The students in the study appeared to be very knowledgeable about the writing process. The researcher felt that this was in part due to the fact that conferences occurred at different points in the production of a piece of writing, allowing the teacher to focus on different aspects of the writing process. Some students were also keenly aware of their own particular writing process. Conferences may be an effective pedagogical tool in promoting a child's understanding of writing and of his own writing process.

The predictability of the conferences appeared to give the students a sense of reassurance and control. The importance of establishing predictable conference routines and structures is implied.

All the teachers felt that viewing the videotapes of



their conferences was a valuable experience. Not only did they learn more about their students but they also had the opportunity to observe their conferencing techniques and discuss their thoughts and actions. It is suggested that teachers periodically videotape their conferences and discuss them with colleagues. This could lead to the improvement of conference techniques and the clarification of beliefs and goals.

### Directions for Further Research

As was indicated in the review of the related literature and research, research into writing conferences is in its infancy. As such, the research field is virtually wide open. Those few studies which have been completed need to be replicated at different grade levels. Graves (1981) suggests that future studies focus on the teacher and he raises the following questions. What do teachers do when they confer with children about their writing? How do teachers attend to children's papers in the writing conferences? What is the number, frequency, and type of conference conducted in the classroom? How do teachers change what they attend to in the writing conference over a period of time?

The design and findings of this study also raised questions and provide direction for further research.

1. The sample size limits the generalizability of this



study. It is suggested that further studies be conducted with a larger sample or that this study be replicated to determine if the same patterns emerge. Another study could examine the effect of variables such as age, sex and writing proficiency while taking into considerations interpersonal variables between the teacher and the student. Using one teacher and a larger sample of his/her students is another possibility.

2. Teachers' and students' beliefs about writing and learning should be examined in relation to the nature of their conferences and in relation to their perceptions of conferences. The teachers in this study focused on different things in conferences, for example the child's writing process, or praise. To what extent is this related to the teacher's beliefs about writing or the teacher's beliefs about learning? How is the focus of conferences related to perceptions of the role of conferences in the writing process?

This study revealed that the students' perceptions of factors affecting the quality of a conference were varied and differed considerably from the teachers' perceptions. A study could be undertaken to more thoroughly examine the factors which students and teachers believe affect the quality of a conference.

Half of the students felt that the story was a factor affecting the quality of a conference. Teachers' and stu-



dents' perceptions of a story should be examined in relation to their perceptions of the conference and to the nature of the conferences.

3. The study showed that the nature of a student's conference could change from one conference to the next. It is suggested that conferences be studied over a longer period to discover if certain trends or patterns emerge. The relationship between the nature of the conference and the stage of completion of the piece of writing should also be examined. Students' and teachers' perceptions of conferences could also be examined in a longitudinal study to discover if changes or patterns occur.

4. The three teachers stated that one reason they used conferences was because of the personal contact with students. The researcher intuitively felt that the students thrived on this personal contact. The affective nature of writing conferences needs to be examined.

5. All of the teachers and most of the students felt that conferences were held to help the students with their writing. This study did not examine the effect of conferences on the students' writing. If conferences are held over a period of time, do students internalize the process and learn to conference themselves?

Teachers and students felt that the conferences provi-





ded the teacher with information about the students' writing. What kind(s) of information does the teacher learn through the conference? What use is made of this information? A study could examine conferences as a contributing factor in promoting growth in writing.

6. All of the students and teachers made reference to or implied that the student maintained ownership of his writing. There was also some evidence of students making decisions about their writing during the conferences. A student's ownership of his writing could be followed throughout the writing process, as well as in the conferences.

### Concluding Statement

This study has provided some insight into students' and teachers' perceptions of writing conferences. The commonalities, the differences, and uniqueness of their perceptions were also discussed. The nature of the conferences was analyzed showing evidence of the six elements of scaffolding (Graves 1982, 1983c), as well as other distinguishing features. The students' and teachers' perceptions of conferences were usually consistent with the researcher's observation of the nature of the conferences.

Specific suggestions for conducting conferences were made based on the findings. The findings also indicated



that conferences may be an effective pedagogical tool in writing instruction.



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## APPENDIX A



## APPENDIX A

### THE PILOT STUDY

The pilot study was conducted in one grade six classroom in the Edmonton Public School System over a two-week period in March, 1984.

#### Purpose

The purposes of the pilot study were to 1. familiarize the researcher with the mechanical aspects of videotaping, 2. determine the appropriateness of interview questions and techniques, 3. establish time frames for conferences and interviews in order to facilitate the scheduling and coordination of the actual study.

#### Choice of School and Students

Two language arts consultants for the school system suggested a possible classroom for the study. After several telephone conversations with the teacher regarding her writing program and the nature of the proposed study, the researcher observed a conference and a writing lesson in the classroom. Details concerning times and dates for the pilot study were then determined. The two students for the study were chosen by the teacher. The researcher's only criteria for selection were that the students have an ability to verbalize and a willingness to participate. Permission was obtained from the school board, the teacher, the principal and the parents of the students involved.



### Procedures

All interviews and conferences were audiotaped. The conferences were also videotaped.

#### Day One

The researcher set up the equipment in the library prior to the commencement of school. Videotaping and interviewing took place in the library because it was difficult to transport equipment to the second floor classroom and because the physical arrangement of the library lent itself to videotaping and interviewing. Because the library was reserved for the project, there were no interruptions from other students or teachers.

The following steps were taken:

1. The researcher observed the teacher's instructions to the class concerning the written assignment.

2. The two students were then seen individually by the researcher in the library. The researcher briefly explained the project and how the students would be involved in it. The students had as well, been informed of the project by the teacher and through information and permission forms sent to the parents. The researcher interviewed the students individually obtaining their view on writing and writing conferences. Some personal background information was also requested. The researcher also inquired into how they viewed the writing conference about to take place that morning.



3. The two writing conferences were videotaped and audiotaped.

4. The videotape was studied that evening to prepare the researcher for the stimulated recall interview the following day. Points at which the videotape would be stopped to elicit comments from the students and teacher were noted.

## Day 2

1. The equipment was set up prior to the commencement of school. The researcher also met with the teacher before school to review the morning's agenda and the purpose of the stimulated recall interview.

2. Each student was interviewed individually. The purpose and the format of the interview were explained to the students. The interview began by having the students tell what they thought had happened in the conference. Before the videotape was used for stimulated recall, the students were shown how to stop the videotape and were encouraged to stop it anytime they wished.

3. The teacher was interviewed concerning her teaching background, her writing program and her writing conferences. Before using the videotape for stimulated recall, the teacher was asked to relate what she felt had happened during the conference. The teacher was encouraged to stop the videotape whenever she wished. The interview took place during school hours with another teacher covering her class.





### Day 3

1. Equipment was set up before school began. The researcher spoke with the teacher to confirm the morning's agenda.

2. A pre-conference interview was held with the two students.

3. The two students' conferences were videotaped and audiotaped.

4. Individual post-conference interviews with the teacher and the students took place shortly after the conferences were videotaped. The researcher asked each student and the teacher to explain what had transpired during the conference. The researcher also asked questions about the nature of the conferences.

5. The researcher spent the remaining twenty minutes of the language arts class videotaping and interviewing several other students regarding their perceptions of writing, the writing program, and writing conferences. This allowed the researcher additional opportunity to test the appropriateness of certain questions.

### Day 4

1. Stimulated recall interviews with the teacher and two students took place in the library. Additional background information about the two students was also obtained from the teacher.

2. The researcher received some feedback from the



teacher and students regarding procedure and questions.

3. The audiotapes were studied to determine the appropriateness of questions.

### Results

The pilot study revealed the following information in relation to its purposes:

1. (a) The researcher felt it was necessary to set up the equipment prior to school commencing. This allowed the researcher sufficient time to check the equipment without causing undue distraction to the students.

1. (b) To facilitate operations, a checklist was developed listing the steps for setting up of equipment.

2. (a) Generally, the interview questions were deemed appropriate. The researcher did, however, find some instances of leading questions and Yes/No response questions when open-ended questions would have been more desirable.

The importance of establishing a common meaning for the term, writing was revealed when one student interpreted 'writing' to mean penmanship.

As a result of the pilot study, several of the interview questions were reworded and a few were added. The researcher also became more aware of the types of interview questions and techniques to avoid.

2. (b) Following an unstructured format, the teacher spoke at length in the interviews covering much of the information the researcher wished to obtain. However, when



the audiotapes were later studied, it was noted that some topics were not addressed. The researcher developed a checklist of headings to serve as a guide in the interview so that all the required information could be elicited.

2. (c) A study of the audiotapes of the stimulated recall interviews revealed that the researcher had not necessarily stopped the videotape at the same places for both students and teacher. It was decided that for the actual study specific stopping points would be identified and noted along with the appropriate videotape counter number. These could then be referred to during the stimulated recall interview.

2. (d) Interviews following the second videotaped conferences revealed considerably more information. Both the students and the teacher appeared to be more relaxed and familiar with the procedures. Because of this, it was decided that in the actual study, three rather than two conferences would be videotaped. The first videotaped conference and stimulated recall interview then would be considered a practice session.

3. (a) The researcher was able to establish the approximate length of conferences and interviews.

3. (b) The feasibility of short pre-conference interviews was questioned because the teacher appeared to be too busy at that time.

3. (c) Both teacher and students preferred to talk about their perceptions of a conference the same day of the



conference. Additional information was obtained during the stimulated recall interview the next day. This procedure will be used in the study.

### Summary

The pilot study afforded an opportunity for the researcher to become familiar with the mechanical aspects of videotaping. Interview questions and techniques were refined. It was decided that in the actual study three conferences would be videotaped with the first to be considered a practice session. Insight into how the conferences and interviews might be scheduled was also gained.





## APPENDIX B



## APPENDIX B

### EXCERPT OF A GENERAL INTERVIEW WITH DIANE

What is a conference?

Well, Mrs. Miller talks with you, one of us at a time while everybody else is writing ...

and she just, she asks us how our writing is going. If we're having any problems. She asks us, what our writing is about, like the one story we're writing then.

Okay. Where do you have that kind of conference?

At the back table.

Uh hm. Do you always have it there?

Yeah.

Do you sit in a special place or anything?

No.

It's just, we sit where you sit.

When did you tell me you had a conference?

Well, I'd say, kind of at the end of writing period.

Okay. Do you know when you're going to have one?

Well, she tells us at the beginning of writing what group it is ...



Uh hm.

and she says in a while we'll go to the back table and when everybody's ready, she'll call us back there.

I see. Um, about how often do you have a conference?

Every, well, just the one group?

Uh hm.

Um, I'd say about once a week.

Uh hm. Do you have them, you know, any other time other than when your whole group goes back there?

Sometimes, only when we're publishing. She'll come around and ask us how our work is going.

Why do you think you have conferences?

Well, I think we have them because (Mrs. Miller) wants to know if we're having any problems in writing, like if the writing is hard for us ... or if it's easy, you know, we can write a whole story in one minute.

Can you think of any other reasons why you might have a conference?

Well, I think she wants to know, like some stories.

She, Mrs. Miller, doesn't write make-believe stories. She writes about jogging or skiing.



Then she probably wants to know what our stories are about.

Tell me what happens in a conference.

Well, we just go, our group goes and sits at the table, she comes back and she does everybody one at a time and she asks us how your writing is and we read it to her and, um, discuss it with her and that's about all.

Do you have to do anything before a conference?

No, just write a story.

Or get started on one.

So, if you were in your class right now and Mrs. Miller said, "What group number do you have?" ...

Three.

Okay, it's group three's time for a conference. What would you do?

We'd go back to the table and the two people who are sitting next to her, well, she conferences with one person and she asks all the things she needs to.

Um, what do you bring to the conference?

Just our folder and we, we usually know which story we're going to conference about, so we talk about one story.

Do you decide which story you're going to talk about?





Yeah, well, usually one we're writing.

That you're working on then?

Yeah.

Well, when you first get started, she asks you about things and in case you forget some questions later on ... she asks you and then it begins to get easier because you know what she asked you and you're ready for what she asks you.

Can you explain that a little more for me?

Well, when you go back there and she asks you, um, how is it going. Well, at the beginning when we first started conferencing, I didn't know what she was going to ask us.

Oh, I see.

So now it's a little bit easier, 'cause you know, you know what she's going to ask you.

I see. Who starts talking at the conference?

Usually Mrs. Miller does.

Uh hm. Okay. How do you know when a conference is ended or going to end?

When everybody's had their turn.

Uh hm.

In the group.



But what about your, your  
talk with Mrs. Miller?  
How do you know when  
that's going to ...

Well, she says to me and is  
everything okay? And I say  
yes and then she says okay and  
we have to switch to somebody  
else.



## APPENDIX C



## APPENDIX C

### A SAMPLE COMPOSITION

#### Part Three

#### Our Holidays

When it was spring holidays  
we went to Hawaii, we swam  
and got sun tons. (My mom & Dad  
got sun burned.) We saw some sharks.  
We were going to catch some  
fish but we were so scared that  
we might get out of the boat.  
One day while our family  
was out taking Tuggy got lost,  
it happened when we were  
at the zoo. We were all  
looking at the lamas. Then Tuggy  
went off some place. We tried  
looking every place but we couldn't  
find him. Finally we ~~went~~ back to  
the hotel, you wouldn't believe it!  
Tuggy was there! He was drinking  
seven-up and eating chips. My mom  
was so glad that we had found  
Tuggy she bought him a  
chocolate bar and a lollipop. (Do you  
know what she bought me? A glass  
of milk!)

That night we went to a  
Italian restaurant. Tuggy ordered  
spaghetti. (You wouldn't believe  
the way he ate it!) Tuggy  
For desert we went to Dairy  
Queen. I got a banana split,  
my mom got a peanut butter  
parfae, my dad got a double delight  
Tuggy got a





## Brainstorming for trip in Hawaii

- ✓ Tuggy gets lost
- x Tells mom his problems
- x starts dreaming
- x Tuggy acts like a puppy dog based on Tuggy
- Tuggy is Rude at the dinner table
- They go to the zoo
- Tuggy shows up at hotels
- eat all of the chips & pop



## APPENDIX D



APPENDIX D

SAMPLE CONFERENCE:

MRS. MILLER AND DIANE CONFERENCE NUMBER ONE

Mrs. Miller  
Okay. How's it going?

Diane  
Good.

Mrs. Miller  
Uh huh.

Diane  
Uh, I've written quite a bit since our last conference. And um it's about, um they caught some fish, they were going to catch some fish. They might fall out of the boat. And then one day while they, while um Peter's family was out walking, Tuggy got lost, it happened when they, they were at the zoo and they were all looking at the llamas and then Tuggy went off someplace and they tried looking every place but they couldn't find him. And then finally they went back to the hotel and um. Tuggy was there and he was drinking 7-Up and eating chips and Peter's mom was so glad that they had found Tuggy she bought him a chocolate bar and a lollypop and Peter says, "Do you know what she bought me?" "She bought me a glass of milk." And um that night they went to an Italian restaurant and Tuggy ordered spaghetti and um Peter says, "You wouldn't believe the way he ate it." And for dessert they went to um Dairy Queen and Peter got a banana split and his mom got a peanut butter parfait and that's all I've written so far.

Mrs. Miller  
Okay. So since we last talked.

Diane  
Uh huh.

Mrs. Miller  
After they went fishing but they were scared of falling out of the boat, they went to the zoo. Tuggy got lost while they were looking at the llamas and they looked all over they couldn't find him. Then they went back to the hotel and there he was drinking 7-Up and eating ice-cream was it?

Diane  
Chips.



Mrs. Miller

Chips.

Chips he was eating. And Peter said, "You know that all I got was a glass of milk." And his mother was so happy to see him, to see Tuggy back again that she bought him what?

Diane

A chocolate bar and lollypop.

Mrs. Miller

A chocolate bar and lollypop and that's when Peter said all he got was milk. So that afternoon, that night they went out for Italian food for supper and for dessert Peter had a, something nice.

Diane

A banana split.

Mrs. Miller

A banana split. Uh huh. Okay. What did you think was going to happen next in the story?

Diane

Um, well I thought like I'd finish telling what um Peter's family had for dessert and then I'll, I'd say later, like the next day and the morning and start a new day.

Mrs. Miller

Uh huh. Uh huh.

Diane

And then I'll have to look at my brainstorming list and um, see what I was writing, but I don't have to do anymore brainstorming 'cause I already, I already have lots.

Mrs. Miller

Oh okay.

Diane

I don't need anymore.

Mrs. Miller

Uh huh

Diane

'til I use up most of the ideas.

Mrs. Miller

Right.

Okay. So you have quite a few ideas for what you think might happen the next day but you haven't decided yet what it will be.





Diane  
Uh huh.

Mrs. Miller  
Uh huh.  
I noticed back in the story about the zoo uh how did Tuggy get back to the zoo do you think? Or to the hotel?

Diane  
I don't know. I wasn't thinking about that then. Probably could have walked or took a bus.

Mrs. Miller  
Do you think it's important information in your story?

Diane  
Yeah, I probably should have it.

Mrs. Miller  
Well, how would you go about doing that, if you were going to add it?

Diane  
Um, I'd uh, put it down here, but if I have to start a next page and then put in an arrow here.

Mrs. Miller  
Okay, uh huh, okay all right. Is there any other questions you wanted to ask me?

Diane  
No.

Mrs. Miller  
No? Did you have any particular favorites in your brainstorming that you think might happen next?

Diane  
Mm.

Mrs. Miller  
Let's have a look at your brainstorming list. What have you got there?

Diane  
Um, well, I've used most of it. Um, one of, these three here, I thought maybe I wouldn't use it for when they're in Hawaii.

Mrs. Miller  
Oh. So you think your story might continue part Hawaii?

Diane  
Yeah.



Mrs. Miller  
Oh, what's going to be ...

Diane  
I'm only on my third chapter and I want to have more chapters.

Mrs. Miller  
Oh.

Diane  
And so I, I don't think these would be appropriate for uh when they're in Hawaii.

Mrs. Miller  
Oh, I see.

Diane  
Like more when they get home.

Mrs. Miller  
I see, how many chapters do you plan on making?

Diane  
About six.

Mrs. Miller  
Oh about six. I see. Did you have any other ideas in mind for the rest of your chapters?

Diane  
No.

Mrs. Miller  
How will you get your ideas?

Diane  
Oh, probably after I start writing, um, I said before ideas just come into my head and then I write them down so I don't forget any.

Mrs. Miller  
Oh, I see.

Diane  
And I choose them.

Mrs. Miller  
Uh huh, okay, so what are you going to do now?

Diane  
Oh, I don't know.



Mrs. Miller

What were doing last? I think you said you wanted to finish writing about ...

Diane

What they, what they got at Dairy Queen.

Mrs. Miller

Uh huh

Diane

And I'll finish doing that and then start the next day.

Mrs. Miller

And then start the next day. Okay. Any questions?

Diane

No.

Mrs. Miller

Okay, all right. Go ahead. Thank you.



## APPENDIX E





APPENDIX E

EXCERPT OF A STIMULATED RECALL INTERVIEW:

MRS. MILLER AND DIANE'S CONFERENCE NUMBER ONE

VIDEO

RESEARCHER

MRS. MILLER

Mrs. Miller

Okay, so since we last  
talked.

Diane

Uh huh.

Mrs. Miller

After they went  
fishing but they were  
scared of falling out  
of the boat, they went  
to the zoo. Tuggy got  
lost while they were  
looking at the llamas  
and they looked all  
over they couldn't  
find him. Then they  
went back to the hotel  
and there he was

Okay, so there I'm  
providing a mirror again,  
just to keep her oriented  
on it, to show her I'm  
being a good audience.  
She's looking at me if  
you'll notice now instead  
of looking at the paper.

So she is, you know,  
listening to see if I was  
listening. (laughs)

(laugh)

drinking 7-  
Up and eating ice-  
cream was it?

Diane

Chips.



VIDEO

RESEARCHER

MRS. MILLER

Mrs. Miller

Chips.

Chips he was eating.

And Peter said, "You  
know that all I got  
was - glass of milk."

What were you  
thinking of in  
that part?

I was trying to remember.  
(laughs)

Oh, I see.

Sometimes I have trouble  
remembering the little  
details, uh that they put  
in the story but I was  
also trying to, I think,  
show her that, put a  
little more, you know,  
emphasis on that part  
that she had been smiling  
when she read that part  
so I know she thought  
that it was pretty funny.

So you wanted  
to

Yes, yeah, let her know

And his mother was so  
happy to see him, to  
see Tuggy back again  
that she bought him  
what?

Notice here in  
the next part  
you sort of  
leave a space  
for her to add  
in.

Diane

A chocolate bar and  
lollypop.

If I do that it's usually  
because I forgot so I  
give her a chance to kind  
of help me.

Mrs. Miller

A chocolate bar and  
lollypop and that's  
when Peter said all he  
got was milk. So that  
afternoon, that night  
they went out for  
Italian food for

Oh



VIDEO

RESEARCHER

MRS. MILLER

supper and for dessert  
Peter had a, something  
nice.

Diane  
A banana split.

Mrs. Miller  
A banana split. Uh  
huh. Okay. What did  
you think was going to  
happen next in the  
story?

Diane  
Um, well I thought  
like I'd finish

There I always think that  
part is a whoops. It's  
the usual, you know,  
question to keep her  
oriented now in the  
story, what's, you know,  
what's happening next.

telling what um  
Peter's family had for  
dessert and then I'll,  
I'd say later, like  
the next day and the  
morning and start a  
new day.

Mrs. Miller  
Uh huh. Uh huh.

Diane  
And then I'll have to  
look at my  
brainstorming list and  
um, see what I was  
writing,

Now, what's all  
happening here?

Okay, so here she's  
revealing her strategy.

Uh huh.

She uses this  
brainstorming technique I  
think quite a bit and um



VIDEO

RESEARCHER

MRS. MILLER

so she was just revealing to me that that's what she's going to do, that that's one of her plans is to use that list that she's made.

And what do you think um, what are your thoughts and feelings when she's telling you all this?

Well, I'm always trying to think, concentrate on what I'm doing. (laughs)

Yeah.

Concentrate on their story.

Uh huh.

And trying to be looking for potential ways that I can, you know, ask about, questions I might ask.

Yeah.  
Okay.

Okay, I probably was quite pleased to see that she was using her list that she had been making.

Uh huh.

but I don't have to do anymore brainstorming 'cause I already, I already have lots.

Mrs. Miller  
Oh okay.

Diane  
I don't need anymore.





VIDEO

RESEARCHER

MRS. MILLER

Mrs. Miller

Uh huh

Diane

'til I use up most of  
the ideas.

Mrs. Miller

Right.

Okay. So you have  
quite a few ideas for  
what you think might  
happen the next day  
but you haven't  
decided yet what it  
will be.

Diane

Uh huh.

Mrs. Miller

Uh huh.

I noticed back in the  
story about the zoo uh  
how did Tuggy get back  
to the zoo do you  
think?

What about that  
part?

Well, there I'm kind of  
presenting, I think she  
can handle this in her  
writing. I didn't want to  
do it at first 'cause I  
wanted to keep, you know,  
the plan ahead

Yeah.

but now I'm going back to  
ask her, there was some  
missing information so  
I'm going to kinda  
present that problem to  
her and see how she  
reacts to it.









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